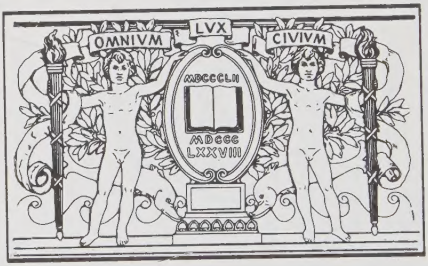


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For a writer as widely read and admired as was Donn Byrne, astonishingly little was written about him during his lifetime. Although he will write no more —"Field of Honor" was completed only a brief while before his death—the name of Donn Byrne will be remembered as long as his hauntingly beautiful and poignant tales remain in the library of modern prose classics.

Thurston Macauley, who wrote in *The Bookman* the first estimate and appreciation of Donn Byrne to be published here since his death, recently went to Ireland to obtain material for this complete biographical and critical study of that writer. He spent much time at Coolmain Castle, where Donn Byrne spent the last part of his life. He also roamed up and down the green land, visiting many places familiar to Donn Byrne's readers, places that he had depicted so glowingly in his books.

Mr. Macauley, in revealing Donn Byrne the man as well as Donn Byrne the writer, will bring to his countless admirers a new understanding of him and will introduce him to others to whom glimpses of this Irish bard's artistry had previously been denied. The book includes a complete bibliography of everything of Donn Byrne's that has been published, from his earliest stories and poems.

DONN BYRNE

BARD OF ARMAGH

Dan Sims

# DONN BYRNE
## BARD OF ARMAGH

*By*

*Thurston Macauley*

*New York and London*

THE CENTURY CO.

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*For*
*Dorothea Donn-Byrne*
*and the Children*

# FOREWORD

THIS book is dedicated to Donn Byrne's widow and children because of the unfailing assistance Mrs. Donn Byrne has given in the preparation of the manuscript. I am also indebted to her for allowing me to go over diaries she kept during various periods, and especially for the privilege of using whatever of her husband's letters, to which under British copyright law she has exclusive rights, I have seen fit to include here. I have also taken the liberty of quoting from various letters written to Donn Byrne, because they seemed to me of particular interest, and I sincerely trust the authors of them will not consider it amiss. At any event, I ask the indulgence in this connection of May Sinclair, James Branch Cabell, Joseph Herge-

sheimer, Professor Richard Burton, Dr. Glenn Frank, and Robert H. Davis.

For much other invaluable help I wish to thank Rosalys Donn-Byrne, Ada McNeill, Lieutenant-General J. J. O'Connell, Bulmer Hobson, Richard Hayward, Shane Leslie, Brinsley MacNamara, David Murray, Dr. Douglas Hyde, Arthur Vance, O. K. Liveright, Dr. Frank Vizetelly, R. C. Dawson, and George Bowers-Bartlett.

T. M.

London,
September 1929.

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DONN BYRNE

BARD OF ARMAGH

*Oh, list to the strains of a poor Irish Harper,*
*And scorn not the strings from his ould withered hand;*
*Remember his fingers could once move more sharper*
*To raise up the memory of his dear native land:*

* * * *

*Although I have travelled this wide world all over,*
*Yet Erin's my home and a parent to me,*
*Then oh, let the ground that my ould bones shall cover*
*Be cut from the soil that is trod by the free;*

*"The Bard of Armagh" (County Tyrone)*
—*From* Ulster Songs and Ballads,
*collected by* H. RICHARD HAYWARD.

# CHAPTER I

## THE BARD OF ARMAGH

"THAT I was born in America is not my fault at all," Donn-Byrne wrote in a letter several months before he was the victim, as was that other strange genius, Isadora Duncan, of an unfortunate motor accident.

The family had for long been a wandering one and his father, "a perfect lunatic on the subject of bridges," crossed the Atlantic to see the one in the Genesee Valley. Thus it was that on November 20, 1889, there was born to Tomas Fearghail Donn-Byrne and Jane D'Arcy McParlane, in New York City, a son who was afterward christened Brian Oswald Donn-Byrne.

That son came, therefore, of a family that seems to have been wanderers as far

as history goes when they held the ranks of generals in Spain and Austria. They were the younger branch of the Wicklow Byrnes who went north with de Courcy and settled around Dundalk. All through Irish records there is mention of the family which was always more interested in sport than anything else, with occasional incursions into art and military affairs. Turlogh O'Carolan, the blind Irish harper, was on a visit to Captain Harry Byrne when he died.

Captain Miles Byrne, a distinguished figure in the Napoleonic era, did not happen to be related to the family, but Captain Gregory Byrne, who commanded the guard at the Duchess d'Angouleme when she appealed to the National Assembly, was. And Freiherr General O'Byrne of Saxony was a cousin.

"On looking up some family records recently [this also from the letter quoted

at the beginning], I found reference to what the Irish writer enthusiastically called the palatial residence of the Byrnes at Scotch Green. This with everything else went under the Encumbered Estates Act so the only thing left to us is a sense of humour. We were about the only one of the four big Irish families of the gap in the North to still keep our mouths, if not our heads, above water. The O'Hanalons, Lords of Oriel, seem to have disappeared. The McGuinesses have been taken over, both their lands and name, by the Porter people. The McKennas of Truagh are heard of nothing except in the old songs. Of my own family, my grandfather is known more for having cut down all the willows for four square miles so that there shall be nothing to beat children with, than for anything else."

But a few months had passed when Mr. and Mrs. Donn-Byrne returned home to South Armagh with their infant son. The

father succumbed to a sudden attack of pneumonia in America where he had gone, this time alone, on another visit, and Brian, then five, had a baby sister, Rosalys, to play with. Five years, however, is a considerable gulf in childhood and the two children were as different in temperament as two children of the same parents could possibly be. Rosalys was placid while Brian was always keen and bright, the son taking after his mother in that respect. When Rosalys was little it was a great source of worry to Brian as to what use his sister would ever be. "What shall we do with Rose?" he often asked his mother. On one occasion he was surprised to find her doing so useful a thing as sewing on buttons. And once when he learned that she had something of a reputation at school for writing doggerel he quite solemnly gave her a shilling to write a sonnet for him.

Brian's family, which had been far from affluent, naturally found circumstances more difficult after the father's death; its members were, however, extremely proud, with traditions to preserve even in the face of a near poverty hovering over them. Being poor was to them but an accident of circumstance and they resigned themselves to make the best of it. Brian was thus obviously left much on his own resources. Fortunately he was able to help during the years of his early education by winning scholarships in the various schools which he attended.

From his fourteenth year he spent much of his holidays at Cushendun in the Glens of Antrim with Ada McNeill, who was helping to organize the Glens Feiseanna—Irish festivals together with the unfortunate Sir Roger Casement, who was executed as a spy during the last war, and Bulmer Hobson,

founder of the Irish volunteer movement. Miss McNeill took in youths who were clever in music, dancing, or language. In those days, before she sold her property to her cousin, Lord Cushendun, she was the Lady of the Manor, having the "big house," as the country people called it, and a large cottage in the village. It was as a small boy, "delicate looking and thin, but all brains," that Brian came to her door. "I liked him from the first moment, but the older people who were organizing with me said, 'How you spoil that unlicked cub of an impudent boy!' I said, 'But he gets the better of all of you each time and when he speaks says something worth hearing!' " So it was that he was allowed liberties the others were not.

"Brian had a certain amount of natural refinement and gentle manners that made me hope much for him in those days," Miss McNeill continues. "I could always rely

on him to help me and come when I wanted an arm to help. He swept all before him at our Feiseanna I think twice—exciting the jealousy and rage of the local competitors." On one occasion there was great difficulty in securing a field for the Irish games, owing to one of the neighboring landlords. Several of Miss McNeill's strongly nationalistic friends composed a glorious lampoon, in the late hours of the night, on this most unpopular landlord which on the day of the Feis was sold at sixpence a copy and later on for two shillings and sixpence, as they grew scarce. Brian mounted a platform and sang the lampoon to the air of "The Wearing of the Green," for the benefit of the listening crowds.

A few years ago Miss McNeill heard that Brian had come back from America where he had made something of a name for himself. He had written to her and she asked

ome and stay again in the Glens of
hich he had loved so as a boy. As
ever, was not possible they planned to meet at Rapallo on the Riviera. This also fell through, but Miss McNeill spent a few days with the Donn-Byrnes at Cannes on her way to Italy for the winter. "Instead of the small, thin boy I had entertained and protected, Brian was now a man and a famous author—in many ways just the same, quite boyish and Irish. But the developed artist knows no home or satisfaction or happiness in this world—I am artist enough myself to understand this—but it was sad—I did not again see Brian. . . ."

Bulmer Hobson describes Brian then as "a rather small boy for his age, but perfectly self-assured, ready to be friendly and to talk to everyone. He was equally fluent in Irish and English and possessed of an intense restless vitality and was up to some mis-

chief all day. We became friends immediately and after that he came several times during school holidays to stay at a little week-end cottage I had in the mountains near Belfast. He was such good company that I was always delighted to have him."

Brian was taken by Hobson whenever possible to political meetings in various parts of the country. There was a meeting at Finnea on the borders of Westmeath and Cavan in 1906 when Hobson was accompanied by Brian and Robert Lynd, now literary editor of the London "Daily News." Lynd wrote a piece on that meeting, included in one of his earlier books, wherein he told of the singing of a "little fair haired boy," who was Brian.

"This and many similar meetings were in the very early stages of the Sinn Fein movement which was then just emerging as the most vital political force in Ireland [Hob-

son explains], and which fifteen years later secured the establishment of the Irish Free State. Brian shared all our enthusiasms. In 1908 I came to Dublin to live and as Brian was then a student at University College we spent a great deal of time together. I then did not hear of him again till early in 1914. I was in New York for a few weeks and saw him constantly then and met his wife at their flat in Brooklyn. When he came to Dublin in 1923 with his family I saw him nearly every day but unfortunately when he gave up his house here we never met again."

The slender, bright-eyed youth in his later 'teens, who might have been encountered at any of the Feiseanna in North Leinster or South Ulster—with a bundle of Irish books under his arm—was then known as Brian O'Beirne. For him nearly every schoolboy of the day, eager for local fame, held a profound respect, for he was noted for

his nimble wit and his copious store of Gaelic knowledge. He was never at a loss in taking issue with the adjudicators on matters of folk-lore or poetry; he seemed to have read nearly everything and could reel off the old Irish poets by the yard. To his fellow competitors the name of Brian O'Beirne appeared on the Feiseanna prize lists with heartbreaking frequency.

It is true that he enjoyed many advantages, especially in that he came from a district where the Irish language was still vibrant and living. However, it was not spoken in the homes or market place; but up in the South Armagh hills, about Camlough, there were few, indeed, of the old folk lacking a ready flow of the Irish at the tips of their tongues. And beyond that they are said to have had an appreciation of song and story which is not to be found in many parts of the fior-Ghaeltacht. From the lips

of these mountain people he heard many a song and rann with which he enriched the local collections of folk-lore; likewise, through intercourse with the sean-daoini, he was adding fluency to his own Irish speech. The school he went to then was a seminary of Irish culture which has produced some of the leading authorities on the Irish of Oirighiall. Indeed, South Armagh was long reputed the happy hunting-ground for students seeking remnants of the north of Ireland's traditional learning.

"My boyhood was spent in those parts of northern Ireland where Gaelic was still spoken," he wrote, "and, having more curiosity about horses, dogs, and boats than about books, I grew up speaking Irish and English with equal fluency!"

Even in those early days, then, Brian was unusually well versed in the Gaelic and while still at school he won the coveted

bronze medal for Irish, ranking first in Ireland for that year. His sister Rosalys today has collections of Gaelic poems that he gathered as a boy. It was therefore to be expected that he came down from the mountains, in due time, to study for a degree in Romance languages and Irish literature at the University of Dublin. One of his professors chanced to be Dr. Douglas Hyde, the noted Gaelic scholar, who said of Brian that he was the only student of his from the Six Counties who knew colloquial Irish. Brian continued to win scholarships and honors of various sorts, from prizes in English, French, and Gaelic literatures to the title of lightweight boxing champion of the University.

A close friendship, one which far outlived the usual student acquaintance, was formed between Brian and Jeremiah O'Connell, or "Ginger," as he is familiarly known,

now Lieutenant-General J. J. O'Connell of the Irish Free State Army.

"I first knew Brian about 1908-9—possibly as early as 1907 [General O'Connell recalls]. I fancy he would have been about eighteen years of age when I first knew him. At that time he had a modern language scholarship in the then just-established National University. The modern literary side, i.e., languages and literature were—and are—an unusual line of study in Ireland. Most of our young fellows of that age have no taste for these. Brian had such a taste in quite a remarkable degree and was well up in four languages, Irish, English, French, and German, and also in those literatures.

"This unusual bent of his brought him in for a certain amount of chaff. For example, we had a magazine, 'The National Student,' to which he used to contribute—probably his first times in print. There were allusions to 'villanous villanelles' on

one occasion, I remember. The remarkable thing in one of a definitely literary bent, was that his tastes were exactly the same as the normal student—nothing pedantic about him. He took the usual interest in games and sports and was on the Boxing Club Committee with me. He was very good himself and very game: I remember a fine battle he put up against a man who must have been three and a half stone [50 pounds] heavier. We often used to follow our coach [Seaman Keogh, ex-lightweight champion of the British Navy] into devious haunts in the city: I well recall the invitation, 'Come in, you sand-bagger,' on one occasion. We knocked around in the usual way of young fellows. Brian with his great sense of humour and ready speech was great company in that way.

"In our student days apart from journals there was no militant national movement—that grew after we left Ireland. Such national moves as there were we took part in.

For instance, we were members of a Students National Literary Society. Again we took part at one election in a great 'rag' in favour of Alderman Cotton, the Nationalist candidate for South County Dublin. But apart from actual intentional movements Brian was very much alive to the life of Ireland and familiar with all phases of it. He travelled all over and was a very accurate observer. I should say, for example, that 'Hangman's House,' which deals with that period, though written long after, would be an outcome of this time to a large extent. And short stories like *Donoghu's Hour* would definitely be the direct outcome of this period. But Brian's definitely Irish 'formation' was not so much political as arising from his knowledge of the language and literature and also his knowledge of Anglo-Irish poetry, ballads, songs, etc., and of Irish history. For example, only a through and through Irishman could do his impersonation of the ballad-singer's 'Bould

Phelim Brady, the Bard of Armagh,' or 'The Inniskillen Dragoon,' or others."

"Dublin is rather a disappointing city, except for its memories, which are mostly bitter [Brian wrote almost twenty years later]. To see it at its best one must go on a July evening to the slope of Three Rock Mountain, and thence it seems like a miracle of silver afloat in the summer air. I can remember it in 1912, when our hearts were high and we hoped to bring about a Pre-Union Dublin of merriment and enduring dignity. I am afraid it is now a city of despair."

It is but a short walk from the University to lovely St. Stephen's Green with its quiet woods, lake, and shaded walks enclosed in the very heart of the Irish capital, a walk down Grafton Street the young Ulster student was frequently wont to take. He remembered "seeing that street like a garden,

so much of beauty did it hold." But it is a different Dublin that you see to-day: "They are not in Grafton Street any more, those girls whose faces, whose silvery voices made a fair day fairer. London and Deauville and New York are the gainers."

Those were grand days for talk, with the Celtic revival just under way in Ireland.

"Though we young students were seldom allowed to open our mouths, we heard of some wonderful doings at the home of Moore, Yeats, or Joseph Biggar in Belfast. The early days of the literary revival were the days of some wild enthusiasms. One proposal on foot was for George Moore to write in French, for Forna, the minister poet, then to translate the piece of literature from the French into Gaelic, and for Lady Gregory to turn it into the Kiltartan peasant dialect. Then Yeats was to 'put literature upon it!'

"In this way they actually got through

with one act of a play telling the story of the old Irish legend of Dermot and Grania. And I'll never forget the gatherings with Shaemus O'Sullivan, the poet, and Joe Campbell, and Countess Marckiewicz—when the old Count would sing 'The Wearing of the Green' with a pleasant Polish accent."

Sackville Street, as Dublin's principal thoroughfare was once called, is now O'Connell Street, and the statue of The Liberator stands near the bridge spanning the gentle waters of Anna Liffey down which graceful swans still glide. "To speak of Dublin today is very difficult. Riot and civil commotion, and the act of the King's Enemies, and of the King's Men, have given 'the finest city upon the say' a tragic dignity." Nevertheless, it is not her struggles and troubled times that Dublin would recall, rather her long line of illustrious sons—great names which have resounded the world

over: Jonathan Swift, the great Dean of St. Patrick's; William Congreve, who made his first appearance as an actor in the theater in Crow Street; Oliver Goldsmith, who wrote songs for the city's ballad singers as a student at Trinity College; Edmund Burke, educated at Trinity where he founded the College Historical Society; Sir Richard Steele, editor of "The Tatler"; Richard Brinsley Sheridan, playwright and orator; in more recent times, Oscar Wilde, George Moore, William Butler Yeats, George Bernard Shaw—and the list is barely begun. No one can be in Dublin and help but feel the influence of such a mighty band.

His student associations led Brian to consider seriously the prospect of embarking upon a diplomatic career. Sir Roger Casement, Bulmer Hobson, and many others of his acquaintance were imbued with the de-

sire of playing an active rôle in the unsettled affairs of the country, so it was only natural that he, too, should not want to be left out. He hoped through his connections to obtain a post in the British Foreign Office; and with this in view decided to continue his education on the Continent after he took his degree at Dublin.

From Dublin, then, Brian proceeded to Paris, where he is said to have shown his protest against the beret and corduroy trousers so much in vogue on the Left Bank by wearing a somewhat remarkable suit of Irish tweeds and a monocle, the combination, I am told, having proved too much for the Quarter. He studied awhile at the Sorbonne, later going on to Leipzig where he expected to take his PH.D. but didn't. The reason for this was not a scholastic one, either: He had been all ready to receive the degree when he was informed that evening

dress was not only *comme il faut* but *au rigeur* on these occasions, and as no Irish gentleman could possibly wear evening clothes in the morning, the dignity of being made a Doctor of Philosophy was hardly enough to counteract the indignity of looking like a waiter at the oral examinations. Thus he refused his degree at the last moment and apparently never regretted that decision afterward. In fact he wrote, some years later, in answer to a request for biographical material from his English publisher, this terse comment on his education: "I do not think there is very much need of mentioning either school or university distinctions, seeing that at the ripe age of twenty-two I had to start on re-educating myself in getting rid of all the errors universities had stuck on me."

## CHAPTER II

### A POOR IRISH HARPER

WHILE still in Dublin, Brian's attention had been diverted awhile from the purely scholastic by a young woman, about his own age, from the south of Ireland also attending English lectures at the University. From a chance acquaintance in the class-room a close friendship sprung up between Brian and the girl, Dorothea Cadogan, and in a relatively short space of time the two decided to get married. Nothing was said of it to any one, however, not even her father, and it was all extremely nebulous, as Brian was leaving for Leipzig, and Dolly, as she has always been called, went out to meet her father then in New York, accompanying him on a trip to South America.

Brian in the meantime had become more and more strongly convinced that affairs of state were not his proper *métier*, assuredly a wise conclusion on his part. No, he thought, poetry was for him, rather than diplomacy; he would be an Irish poet. Consequently, with Dolly on the high seas, somewhere between New York and South America, his mind roved westward and his body soon followed. Just how Brian came back to the country where he happened to be born is still not quite clear. There is a report that he worked awhile somewhere in Central America. And he himself is quoted in one of his very few newspaper interviews to the effect that he had then punched cattle with the idea of becoming a cowboy poet, and "saved a stake on the ranges" which was lost in a poker game aboard the ship to New York. Nevertheless, he did arrive in New York—that much, at least, is certain.

One day in late April 1911, Dolly, returning from her South American trip, was standing by the rail as the ship was being made fast alongside the pier. She saw Brian waiting on the pier and nearly fell overboard. "I've come out to marry you," he told Dolly, announcing that he was looking for a job and a marriage license—and it was very like him to look for the license first. Naturally there was considerable opposition to a jobless youth, barely twenty-one, but they became definitely engaged. Dolly returned abroad with her father, assuring Brian she would come back to New York at the very first opportunity to marry him. She kept her word and the ceremony took place in a little church in Brooklyn on the second day of December 1911.

Before Dolly returned, however, Brian had to get down to the business of earning a living. It was all very well for him plan-

ning to be an Irish poet, but in those days, even in New York, it was difficult, next to impossible, for a poet to exist solely upon the meager pittances that editors were paying for verse. And in Brian's case there would soon be not only one, but two to support. He therefore commenced work at once with the Catholic Encyclopædia and on August 12 secured a better position under Dr. Frank Vizetelly on the staff of the New Standard Dictionary, thereby earning thirty dollars a week. This he probably got through another Irishman, Shaemus O'Sheel, who had also been working for Dr. Vizetelly, but at home, defining Irish terms. With his expert knowledge of the Gaelic, Brian also wanted to work along those lines which he felt he was best equipped for, but this could not be as the field had already been preëmpted by O'Sheel. So Brian was set to defining gen-

eral terms for the dictionary. In the dictionary's editorial offices he had his desk next to Joseph Devlin, who had also come over from Ireland. Dr. Vizetelly relates that the two spent much of their time debating about their country's affairs, which were daily coming more and more to a head; so heated did these discussions finally become that Dr. Vizetelly, who naturally had to see that the work on the dictionary was done on schedule, was forced to intervene. The two men were separated, each being moved to desks at opposite ends of the room.

Dolly was married from the home of cousins living in Brooklyn, whom she told her father she was going to visit as an explanation for her returning to New York that year, and the two commenced their life together in a tiny apartment at 183 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn. From their windows they could look down and revel in the

ever-changing panorama of New York harbor, and in the late winter afternoons Manhattan Island, with its myriad lighted windows, appeared to them a veritable fairyland, as real as that of the Gaels.

Although their heads were, indeed, in the clouds, filled with thoughts of the glamorous future they would carve out for themselves, the two of them, still little more than children, were faced with the cold realities of life that year and for many a year thereafter. Thirty dollars would not go far, even then before the War, toward paying for the bare necessities; their existence was eked out by whatever Brian could do in his free hours in the way of verse, book reviewing, and literary hack-work of one kind or another. He became associated, in those days, with "a gang of howling young literary brigands," among whom were Joyce Kilmer,

Don Marquis, Richardson Wright, Robert Cortes Holliday.

"And there were others, some of them now in jail [he wrote later]. When one of us got a job, the others promptly fastened on him, offering—and really selling him—poems, leaders, reviews, and dramatic and literary criticisms. The magazine usually cracked under the strain, and the gang moved up a block.

"Our poetic efforts generally had to follow pretty closely on the heels of news, and the death of a monarch, I thought, was surely good reason for a sonnet. The sonnet would bring just four dollars at a certain magazine office, and I needed the four dollars. I spent a whole afternoon writing the poem of lament, then took it to the office of the publication, which was to go to press that night. Then I spent some anxious hours waiting. But night came, the paper went to press, and—the great man refused to die. I was out four dollars. . . ."

The tragic sequel to this story, which he omitted to relate, is that when the subject of his sonnet actually did die, some time afterward, the sonnet was then nowhere to be found!

It was at this time that Brian dropped the hyphen from his family name and began to sign his name simply as Donn Byrne; bits of Irish verse appeared here and there in the newspapers and some of the lesser known periodicals above that signature, some of it original and some from the Gaelic. One day he sent a little poem of four stanzas to "Harpers" and promptly received a check for ten dollars in return from the editor, who had wisely recognized the beautiful quality of the verse as well as the by no means uncertain skill of the unknown writer who had penned it. It was called "The Piper" and appeared in the February 1912 issue of "Harper's." Both as one of

his very first published writings, and because it, to me, completely reflects the haunting spirit Donn Byrne was to capture in his later work, I have felt it wise to include it in its entirety here:

I will take my pipes and go now, for the bees upon the sill
Are singing of the summer that is coming from the stars.
I will take my pipes and go now, for the little mountain rill
Is pleading with the bagpipes in tender, crooning bars.

I will go o'er hills and valleys, and through fields of ripening rye,
And the linnet and the throstle and the bittern in the sedge
Will hush their throats and listen, as the piper passes by
On the great long road of silver that ends at the world's edge.

I will take my pipes and go now, for the
sandflower on the dunes
Is a-weary of the sobbing of the great
white sea,
And is asking for the piper, with his bas-
ketful of tunes,
To play the merry lilting thing that sets
all hearts free.

I will take my pipes and go now, and God
go with you all,
And keep all sorrow from you, and the
dark heart's load;
I will take my pipes and go now, for I hear
the summer call,
And you'll hear the pipes a-singing as I
pass along the road.

After the publication of "The Piper" the name of Donn Byrne was added to the list of members of a poetry society and later he gave his young wife a volume of Ernest Dowson's poems on the fly-leaf of which he

scribbled "To Dorothea Donn-Byrne from 'a poor Irish harper.'" A slim little book which he always kept near him ever afterward in all his wanderings was "Summer of Love," bearing therein this inscription by the author: "To Donn Byrne, Poet, from Joyce Kilmer. Jan. 27, 1912." That date, incidentally, happens to have been the day when Kilmer left the New Standard Dictionary, the work that was to be done being all but completed; in less than a month Brian, too, found himself with no regular means of income, although it was fortunately not long afterward until he obtained another position with the Century Dictionary which paid him ten dollars more each week than he had gotten previously.

During the course of the next year or so he continued to publish his verse in the magazines and papers, and Hedda, his first child, was born. In the January 1914 issue

of "Smart Set" there appeared a poem of his, "*Beannacht Leat*—My Blessing with You," another poem in the same number of the publication being "Old Poets," by his friend, Joyce Kilmer. The fact that these two young men then writing poetry were no longer working together did not mean that their acquaintance ceased; on the contrary they made it a point to meet more and more often. When Brian had finished his day's work on the dictionary, he and Dolly would spend the evening at the Kilmers or ask them over to the place where they were then living on Clark Street, still in Brooklyn Heights.

On one such occasion Kilmer showed Brian a check for twenty-five dollars just received from "Smart Set" for a short story he had written. "If he can do that, so can I," said Brian, who thereupon promptly sat down and wrote his first story. He called it

*Battle,* and scarcely waiting to read it through again once it was finished he sent it off to that same magazine. Imagine his surprise and delight when he received, by return post, a check, not for twenty-five, but *fifty* dollars! Very few writers have had the luck to sell their initial opus to the first editor who read it.

*Battle* took up but two pages in the February 1914 "Smart Set." The early work of any author is always of considerable interest in a study of that man's achievements, for one can usually find therein traces or suggestions of style and method to be worked out later in maturity. This first published story by Donn Byrne happens to be exceptionally unique in that it and others produced immediately thereafter bear scarcely the slightest resemblance to the writings of Donn Byrne now familiar to wide audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.

Like Stephen Crane, he wrote of battles never seen, portraying the grim horrors of war in a vivid and realistic manner; in fact, as I read over these first stories of Donn Byrne in the worn magazine files I was struck more than once by a definite likeness to Crane, both in subject and manner, which likeness seemed to me to have been an altogether unconscious one. After a three months' interval a second story by Donn Byrne appeared in the May "Smart Set," *In a Cellar,* a somewhat harsh tale of a Russian pogrom; in the July number there was another war narrative, *Slaves of the Gun;* in August was printed *Donoghu's Hour,* a story of an Irishman who enlisted in the Foreign Legion to fight in Africa against the British, whom he bitterly hated. It certainly seems almost prophetic, too, to find Donn Byrne writing, but a few months before the hand of Mars was to blacken all

Europe, of the harrowing experiences of men on battle-fields where great nations were doing their utmost, with the aid of modern warfare, to annihilate their enemies.

While much has already been written elsewhere of the halcyon days of the "Smart Set," when that magazine, under the editorial ægis of H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, and even earlier, was like a firebrand to the rest of the sterile world of American letters, it is decidedly worth noting those who were Donn Byrne's brothers in ink when he made his début. Mencken and Nathan were regular contributors to the magazine even then, writing, of course, on books and plays respectively. When I had finished *Battle* I read that issue almost from cover to cover, for among the others represented therein were Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and George Bronson How-

ard. Nathan, at that time, in addition to his theater pieces was doing a "Night Romance of Europe" series, writing of the then gay night life in the foreign capitals. Although there was nothing by Theodore Dreiser in that particular number, his stories and plays were being published frequently in "Smart Set." Assuredly it was a worthy company of midwives gathered for the birth of a fledgling writer.

However, one of the most interesting discoveries I made was that the name of the editor which appeared on that February 1914 issue was none other than Willard Huntington Wright, who has more recently acquired both fame and fortune for his detective fiction written under the pseudonym of S. S. Van Dine. Referring afterwards to his beginning in literature, Donn Byrne said, "He bought my first story—and a few weeks later the magazine had a new editor!"

## CHAPTER III

### A VARIETY OF THINGS

In the week *Battle* was written a second child was born to the Donn-Byrnes, this time a boy, St. John. From then on Brian decided he would write stories and, yes, novels later. He looked forward eagerly to the day when he would be making enough from his stories to be able to devote all his time to writing. In the meantime he and Dolly and the two children had to live and their bare living expenses seemed to have increased at an appalling rate, indeed. Furthermore, his work on the Century Dictionary had come to an end; he had to find some means of income and find it quickly.

Some of his friends were young newspapermen and it seemed an excellent idea

for him to get a job on a paper, too: it would be writing and he could work on his stories in his spare time. When he walked into the office of the old morning "Sun," he was taken on as a cub reporter at a salary said to have been fifteen dollars a week, because some one coupled the name of Donn Byrne with ventures in verse and fiction. At the end of several weeks, however, Brian was dismissed, having been told that he used "bad English." This seems hard to reconcile until it is realized that the criticism undoubtedly meant that he used bad *newspaper* English: very likely he was utterly unable to make what he wrote for the "Sun" approximate anywhere nearly the sort of journalese that was expected, nay, demanded. An equally unfortunate experience followed when he was made an editorial writer on the now extinct "Globe," one of the many newspapers which passed into

oblivion through the late Mr. Munsey's amalgamations. Brian either offended one of the paper's sacred cows or made some political *faux pas* in an editorial, for he had turned out scarcely a half-dozen when he was again politely, but firmly, shown the door. Apparently quite undaunted by these failures in the world of journalism, he went to work on still another paper, the "Eagle" of Brooklyn, where he resided, this time as copy-reader. He lasted with the "Eagle" longer than he had in either of the preceding instances, and when he left after a few months it was not because the paper was tired of him but that he was tired of the paper. And also for the reason that he wanted to try his luck as a free-lance writer.

Brian, however, found free-lancing too impractical for one just starting to write; when he happened to hear of a position open doing publicity for the Philippine Islands

he hurried up to see about it. He succeeded in talking himself into it with fifty dollars as a weekly stipend, though curiously enough during the four or five months the job lasted he never bothered to learn where the Philippines were!

"I was one of a group of young Irishmen here on the wings of Adventure, actuated by the same spirit which has written the names of our lads on the pages of action throughout the world. Soldiers of fortune some call us. Well, perhaps they are right. . . ." One of that group was "Ginger" O'Connell. Another "did his bit" in Durland's Riding Academy, later going to be valet to a horse on Long Island. At this time "Ginger" was driving a milk wagon for Borden's, and Brian was working on commission in a futile endeavor to sell an electric automobile that nobody wanted to buy. Apparently he realized this for the least interest shown in the

car was immediately discouraged by Brian telling his "prospect" how rotten he thought they were. Both Brian and "Ginger" were Masters of the University of Dublin—

"but no one seemed to hold that against us. They let us work in spite of our scholastic equipment. Our group used to eat and argue at a little restaurant at the corner of Thirty-fourth Street and Third Avenue—wonderful place—got a whole dinner, pie à la mode and everything for thirty cents. And the Irish waitresses always gave us the most extraordinary helpings of clam chowder! Then 'Ginger' heard of a revolution about to be staged down in Venezuela and the clam chowder was forgotten."

"Ginger" himself has this to add concerning Brian's early days in Brooklyn:

"Cheerfulness in adversity was his outstanding characteristic. Nothing could perturb him. I remember a soda-fountain kept by a

cheerful Jew whom Brian named 'Romaika, the pleasant Wop.' Again the proprietor of a Coney Island sideshow known as the 'Witching Waves' was 'MacCarthy More' —his name being MacCarthy and MacCarthy More being the old time chief of that clan. There was a celebrated music-hall artist, Eddie Foy, who used to perform with his children, and I remember Brian translating into excellent French, without changing the metre, one of his songs called 'The Green Grass Grew All Around, All Around.'

"At this time he developed his short stories for the magazines as being the quickest way of landing ready cash. This was interspersed with subediting and similar work. All the time he read and moved around meeting all sorts of people. Even then he always managed to fit in a certain amount of Irish atmosphere, any new departure from Ireland—Ulster Players, for example, on their American visit; Irish-American week-

lies, etc. All these helped to keep him in touch. Gradually a time came when the short stories enabled him to accumulate enough money to ease off while he made time to write a novel. I remember that I for a long time advised against a novel—or at least counselled going slowly. Brian with a more accurate measure of what was a good chance to take began when his safety margin was a minimum. The sequel amply justified him."

He sold another fine war story, *Biplane No. 2,* this dealing with the emotions of an aviator directing the battle firing from his plane high above the lines, which appeared in the September (1914) "Century." The year following was a banner year for Donn Byrne; his writings were for the first time really beginning to bear fruit. In October of 1915 he achieved something of a record with the publication of stories simultaneously in two different magazines: *The*

*Balance of Might* in "McBride's Magazine" (which, alas, did not survive very long thereafter), and *The Wake* in "Harper's." In the former, a yarn of the prize-ring, there is more than a suggestion of the manner of a writer who was to come along over a decade later—Ernest Hemingway. The latter piece, rightly included in the O'Brien anthology of best American short stories of the year, may be said to mark the first appearance, outside of poetry, of the later Donn Byrne; however, this was a vein which was otherwise to lie untapped for some few years yet. *The Wake* is a finely conceived mental study of a man awaiting death at the hands of another over the young wife, now dead, containing this excellent bit: "His idea of death was that he would pitch headlong, as from a high tower, into a bottomless dark space. . . ."

The list of magazines including Donn

Byrne among their contributors was increasing steadily: besides those already mentioned, he was now writing for "Scribner's," "Red Book," "Ladies Home Journal," and "Hearst's International." He received seventy-five dollars from "Harper's" for *The Wake*, but from then on he was given many times that amount for his stories. Ray Long and Karl Herriman were among the first of the more important editors to perceive in the early work of Donn Byrne the touch of a writer of real talent and great promise. His stories which were published during those years when he was struggling to gain recognition are, almost without exception, written with a keen sense of craftsmanship, whatever crudities they may possess not in the least marring the effect of the whole.

As editor of "Red Book" Ray Long read with zest the stories submitted by Donn

Byrne and when he took over the editorial reins of "Hearst's International" he secured a contract for the young writer. It was Donn Byrne's first contract and consequently it gave him a new sense of self-confidence and security: he was now well on the road to becoming a successful author. Later the same year witnessed the appearance of his first book, a collection of short stories that had been published during the course of the several years preceding. It was called "Stories Without Women" and brought out by Hearst's International Library. Only 639 copies are reported to have been sold; Brian bought thirteen of the sold copies himself, but where the rest of them went was always a source of considerable mystery to him. If it did nothing else, however, his first book at least increased his reputation among editors and fellow writers; he received this letter of

praise from a member of the craft of long standing:

MY DEAR BYRNE:

I am delighted to possess your book "Stories Without Women," by Donn Byrne. My only suggestion is that you change the title of the book to "Donn Byrne Without Women."

Be that as it may, I honestly believe you have done a great work. But it is not by any means as good as you can do.

I might say you possess facilities that few short story men in this country possess:

i—Celtic temperament in combination with a Yiddish environment.

ii—A marked irreverence for convention.

iii—Appalling confidence in yourself, the same which paradoxically is justified.

iv—You respond to encouragement in the shape of:

i—Increased revenues.

ii—Pride of authorship.

iii—The laugh on your enemies.

One of which I am not nor ever shall be.

Sincerely,

Nov. 6, 1915. R. H. Davis

I must confess that I puzzled for a long while over Mr. Davis's mention of "a Yiddish environment" until I remembered that it was about then that he had somehow attached to himself a Jewish youth from the East Side, Samson Raphaelson by name. The story goes that Raphaelson had just three dollars to his name when he met Brian. "You come with me," Brian is reported to have said. "I'll give you enough work for eight men and you won't starve, either." And so Raphaelson—later a successful dramatist: he wrote "The Jazz Singer"—became a combination secretary and bodyguard to Brian. To quote Raphaelson: "My duties were to keep him out of fights and jail, to see that none of his children tumbled off the balcony, to help

him dodge taxis. He was utterly helpless in many ways. . . ."

Two more war stories by Donn Byrne were published in 1916, both in "Scribner's." In *Underseaboat F-33* he was no doubt directly inspired by the sinking of the *Lusitania,* but a few months earlier, off the coast of Ireland. In it there is a sense of destiny being meted out, for the submarine which sends a ship and its passengers down to watery grave is afterward swallowed up in a maelstrom off Norway. *Super-dirigible Gamma-I* tells of an airship commander's longing for revenge when flying over enemy territory: his wife and children had been killed in a London air-raid and after destroying a munitions center he orders his crew to drop bombs upon the sleeping inhabitants of a near-by town. This, however, the men refuse to carry out.

*The Bronze Box,* a story in three instalments, which appeared in "Ladies Home Journal" that year, is written with a great deal more finesse than Donn Byrne had previously shown. He apparently took infinite pains in relating a new version of the mystery of the Ark of the Covenant, and how it came, by way of Syria, to the shop of a curio collector in Brooklyn. Its only weakness is in the way a thin "love interest" is superimposed upon the framework of the narrative. There is the same fault to find, though to a lesser degree, with *The Island of Youth,* another serial story published in the same magazine at the end of the year. Here again is an old legend chosen as the central theme, this one Ponce de Leon's quest for the fountain of youth. The aged Spanish soldier figures in a prologue, while the central character of the tale itself is supposed to be a descendant of his.

Donn Byrne is at his best in describing the lovely West Indian setting of his story.

Still in his twenties, Brian was not only selling everything he wrote, but commanding prices for his stories that many a writer, older and more experienced than he, well might envy. He moved from the city out to a little place on the Sound in Connecticut where it was easier to work and where he could swim or sail or play golf when he felt like doing so. It was at this period, too, that he made his first appearance in the pages of "The Saturday Evening Post." He had already been writing regularly for "Ladies Home Journal," as I have mentioned, and George Horace Lorimer wrote him, suggesting that he send some of his work to the other Curtis publication. It was not long thereafter when another writer, who had also made his début in the "Post"

about the same time, sent Brian this interesting letter:

November 10, 1917

The Dower House
West Chester, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Donn Byrne:

It has been in my head for a great many months to write and say how much I liked what you did. I clearly remember the pleasure I got from a story of yours called Gamma something or other, about a war dirigible. I thought at the time that it was very lovely writing spread on a subject not so important as it should have been; I don't mean that war isn't important, but the spectacle of country spread under your story, the beautifully dissolving colours and forms, it seemed to me, invited the most simple and ancient story instead of modern complexities and engines. Now that you are writing for The Post, I have, of course, a more personal interest in the results. This, I think, is a very valuable privilege; not only be-

cause of Mr. Lorimer's extreme generosity but because, in spite of what we may say privately about the public at large, an audience of something like four million is a considerable fact.

I began with a stained-glass manner in The Forum, and I can assure you that I have come only to be concerned with a genuine schooling in the fundamental object of fiction. . . . I told Mr. Lorimer, only the other day, how much I liked your work, and found out later that you had not been personally to The Post. Why don't you come over and see me—I have rather a nice old house—when we can gabble and go en masse to view a staff so appreciative of our efforts as to pay real money for them?

Very faithfully yours,

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

It was not until some few months later, however, that the two met, for Brian re-

ceived, in the following March, this second letter from Hergesheimer:

My dear Donn Byrne:

I wish you could get to a place called Poligiani's, an Italian restaurant on Forty-sixth Street close to Broadway, it's in the telephone book, for lunch about twelve-thirty Monday. I'm going on to New England later in the day, am almost never in New York and it would be nice to see you. The place is small and you'd know me at once. A fat individual in rough good clothes, a smooth rather silly face and short hair.

Just this note on the off chance.

Brian now had time to start his first novel, something he had been wanting to do for several years. He had certain decided views on novel writing—as is not infrequently the case with beginning novelists—and his ideal of the perfect novel he then expressed thus:

"the form of the novel is changing. We are passing from the conventional, slow-moving, cumbersome three-decker of Victorian days to a tale that is a collection of vivid pictures strung together by a central theme and relieved at logical intervals by slow fade-outs of physical scenery and of mental atmosphere. As to the substance of the novel, that ought to be a study of an important phase of modern life, and the theme and its treatment should have material value as well as artistic. It should be in terms of modern intercourse, as frank as necessary, and not a word franker. There must of necessity be realism—but it should be tinctured with spirituality and romanticism. Above all, there must be a story—even if art has to be sacrificed to that end. For the people want a story, and a story you must tell them. Let 'art' go if it must. We have had too damned much art, and too little literature."

For his "important phase of modern life" he chose the conflict between capital and labor and offended quite a few of the critics, it seems, by his strong language and cussing. It was published by "Harper's" toward the end of 1919 under the title of "The Stranger's Banquet." By no means a good novel, it gave more than a hint of what was to come; and the reviews were quite out of the ordinary for a first novel. The "Herald" called it "an unusual novel by a writer of unusual power." It remained, however, for an anonymous critic in the New York "Times" to hit the nail squarely on the head, in my opinion, in his review, part of which follows:

"When he . . . writes with poetic mysticism of Nature and of the call of life to the heart and soul of a girl, Mr. Byrne's work frequently rises to a high level of excellence. His visions of ships and of the romance of

the high seas, of the old garden in Spring and Summer, of the road through Westchester, where the tall trees stood 'dignified as Druids' watching two who lay dead, two to whom even death could not bring dignity—such passages as these have a poetry, a beauty quite out of the ordinary. . . . It is a markedly uneven book, this of Mr. Byrne's, but one which promises well for the author's future, provided he is willing to leave realism to others and devote himself to the sort of mystic romance which would seem to be his proper *métier*."

In that last sentence the "Times" reviewer displayed a remarkably keen sense of perception, prophesying with amazing accuracy the proper future road for Donn Byrne to travel in his books.

His first novel was scarcely off the presses when he began a second one which was published, also by Harper's, in the course of the next year. This, "The Fool-

ish Matrons," contained material enough for four novels, being concerned with the entanglements of the lives of four women, and how three of them squander their lives, only the fourth being wise—"Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands." "The Foolish Matrons" is immensely significant in any study of Donn Byrne's work, for it plainly shows him at the turning point in his career, where he must take the decisive step in one direction or the other. The decision confronting him was one that nearly every writer has to face at one time or another: whether to turn out pot-boilers, pandering to the popular taste with racy *affaires de cœur*, or write of the beauty he always saw in life. Although there is much in "The Foolish Matrons" that is commonplace and even downright cheap and gaudy, there is withal revealed a fine feeling for life, a ten-

derness, and now and again great understanding. The book is of value, too, for the picture painted of New York of ten years ago, and it is astonishing to note the changes that have taken place within the short space of one decade. The life of the city seeps into the very souls of his characters, dragging them down, a life from which he himself was soon thereafter to escape, purging himself in the clear, pure air of the land of his forbears. . . . This was New York to Donn Byrne then:

"She had reached her climacteric, loved, applauded, admired. Then she should have taken on a graceful silvering, until her physical aspect evaporated and she was nothing but spirit, *genius loci,* as Paris, or London Town. But instead right then she had rebelled against ageing, against passionate love's changing into tender kindliness and she whom gallant old Peter Mayre had loved now called on the scum of Europe,

Jew and Gentile, offering them herself, her wealth, her dignity, to be enjoyed, to be spent, to be fouled. Her comeliness was gone under a cloud of cheap paint, her fading eyes were bright and hectic with stimulant, her lips that once were sweet and firm were now loose and moist, and twisted into a cheap jest. A nasty, cheap old woman, followed by a rout who were mainly *maquereaux* of commerce.

"Here was worse than tragedy, though: that it was not only the Jew and Gentile of low Europe that New York held in thrall, but the best of her own sons and the best of the country, infecting them with her own terrible neurasthenia, ruining them spiritually, and then mentally, and physically last of all, and letting them go with a callow laugh. There were graves in Potter's Field where genius lay, and there were barrooms in the Bowery where magnificent ideals were trampled underfoot like the sawdust on the floor. And the fault was New York's."

Both the first two novels, "The Stranger's Banquet" and "The Foolish Matrons," enjoyed a fair sale and both were sold to motion-picture producers for film versions, Brian receiving $10,000 for each. Through his friend, Arthur Somers Roche, Brian was also given a contract with Bayard Veiller to do original stories for the screen; however, nothing very much came of this, as Brian apparently found his talents unsuited to the whims of Hollywood. The year 1920 was another period of note for the Donn-Byrnes: twins were born, a boy and girl who were named Brian and Jane, and Dolly suddenly came into prominence herself as co-author, with Gilda Varesi, of a play both brilliant and successful, "Enter Madame."

Books that other writers gave Brian he always kept; there are inscriptions in several of them which tell whom he knew at this time. For instance, there is a copy of

"Loot," in which the author wrote: "To Donn Byrne, for whose genius I have the most profound respect. Arthur Somers Roche, Darien, Conn., June 17, 1919." Again, in "Montes The Matador," is this written: "To Donn Byrne, in memory of a great evening redeemed by his artistry and saved in spite of bad whisky—from the author, Frank Harris, 10 July, 1919." One of the most curious of all, however, is the inscription in "God's Man": "To my good friend and fellow artist (one of that meagre half-dozen of American writers who count) Brian O.D.B. from George Bronson Howard. (N.B. With the respectful and affectionate admiration of one who knows how hard it is to do what he seems to do so easily and who feels it a privilege [and rather a piece of luck] to call him [and to be called his] friend. Geo. 12 East 8th St. N.Y. May 31, 1919)."

Brian would warmly defend some other writer who had been raked over the coals, but he rarely replied to anything, however uncomplimentary, that the critics may have said against him. The files of the New York "Times" yielded the following letter addressed to its editor:

I don't know Mr. Dreiser. Towards other work of his I could deliver as harsh criticisms as your reviewer delivered on "Twelve Men." But when a work of art, such as "Twelve Men" is, appears, for Heaven's sake let us sit around and applaud a little. It's mighty hard to get to work again when a sincere and splendid appearance on the literary stage is met with a shower of bricks.

DONN BYRNE

May 6, 1919,
Riverside, Conn.

The fame of Donn Byrne, successful writer of short stories and novels, had ap-

parently even spread to Canada, for one summer about that time there came alarming reports from Prince Edward Island to the effect that "Donn Byrne" had eloped with a young woman and $200,000 in stocks and bonds, leaving a trail of worthless checks behind him all the way to the Orient. An official in a Chinese bank happened to see a story by Donn Byrne in a copy of "The Saturday Evening Post," and at once wrote a letter to Mr. Lorimer, requesting whatever information was forthcoming concerning this "notorious" author. Mr. Lorimer knew, however, that Donn Byrne couldn't possibly be in Shanghai and Port Jefferson, Long Island, at the same time, and forwarded the letter to Brian at the latter place, where he was spending the summer with his wife and children. Brian went immediately to a detective agency and started an investigation which resulted in the eventual capture and

imprisonment of the man who borrowed his name, not, however, before he was subjected to no little embarrassment on his own part and ridicule from his friends.

One day when Brian was lunching with a very proper acquaintance in the Players' Club, Karl Harriman came up to him and asked him if he were "serious" in the affair of the abducted maid and money.

## CHAPTER IV

### MESSER MARCO POLO

Brian and Dolly pooled their cash, including the royalties from "Enter Madame," and bought a place at Riverside, Connecticut, for $20,000. There it was that Brian wrote his "Messer Marco Polo," in about three months of 1921. It first appeared in three instalments of "Century," commencing that August, and soon thereafter in a slim little volume of but 147 pages, being issued by the publishing house of the same name. One of the first of the many tributes its author received was this brief, though none the less sincere note, from one recognized as the leader in the romantic school of writing in America:

September 27, 1921

This is but a word of the very heartiest conceivable congratulations upon "Messer Marco Polo," which appears to me the most beautiful and exquisite thing I have encountered in I know not how many years. It seems a book, in fine, that I have waited for a long while, and I thank you most cordially for writing it.

Yours faithfully,

James Branch Cabell

Dumbarton Grange,
Dumbarton, Virginia.

Mr. Cabell further expressed his admiration of the book in a review which was printed in "The Nation," issue of November 2, 1921. Headed "Beauty and Wizardry," this unusual critique seems to me to be decidedly worth reprinting here, at least in part:

"Not often does one sustain the sense of having long awaited just the book which

time and chance and a kindred desire in another's being have combined to produce at last, and to make at last a vended commodity as easy now to come by as blotting-paper or bad whiskey. I have this sense about 'Messer Marco Polo.' It is, to me, the most delightful of surprises, a bit of unanticipated flotsam washed up from the wide sunless sea of 'realism.' Nobody, I think, could possibly have looked for its coming through the auctorial welter—whose susurrus is after all but a more literate vast *Ain't it awful, Mabel*—among those fretful waves of indignation over the dreariness of small-town life and the loneliness of the artist in this unappreciative country, and over how terribly our army swore in Flanders, and over the venality of our press and pulpit and every other institution, and (lonely lisper of good yet to come) over the imminence of several more stupendous wars that will wipe out us and all our sordid existence. And yet through these gray floods

of portentous information (here neatly to round off my simile) comes floating this carved spar of loveliness with absolutely startling irrelevance.

"That 'Messer Marco Polo' should have 'happened' at this precise moment seems to me a small miracle so pleasure-giving that I hastily waive all consideration as to the book's ultimate value. I only know that I have joyed in the reading of it, somewhat as the partially starved might rejoice in an unexpected windfall of savory food, without any need to deliberate the viands' durability. . . .

"Yet the essential thing about this book is that it is prodigal in the transforming magic which—heaven knows, in how few books—quite incommunicably lends romantic beauty to this or that not necessarily unusual or fertile theme, somewhat as sunset tinges the wooded and the barren mountain with equal glamor. Mr. Byrne is a practitioner, in fine, of that rare and unteachable

wizardry without which one writes only words, and without which the most carefully made sentences tend but to bury one another like neat undertakers. . . . So near as I can word it, then, this tale is a fantastic and gracious pageant, saddened tenderly by the evanescence of its beauty . . . a very magically beautiful book."

What young author wouldn't appreciate such a review, especially since it had been penned by one of the very few definitely entitled to be described by the word "artist"? Naturally Brian did and as soon as he had read it he sat down and wrote to thank Mr. Cabell for this, practically the first critical consideration of real value to be given him. And this acknowledgment came in reply:

It is excellent hearing that you were pleased by "The Nation" review. Dr. Van Doren, I know not how, heard of my admira-

tion for your book, and asked me for a paper thereon, which I was more than glad to "do." I would have written at more length, had it not been put to me that "The Nation" could use less than a page now, or more than a page a little later: and to help the book, so far as I and "The Nation" might, it seemed to me that promptness was the main thing. So I curtailed.

I hope to heaven you plan to work yet further the opulence of this vein,—and am

Yours faithfully,

JAMES BRANCH CABELL

Brian had been wanting to write his lovely tale of Marco Polo for some years before but circumstances had always prevented it. The history of how it finally came to be written, as well as the idea's conception and eventual development, is told in this letter by Maxwell Aley, then managing editor of "Century," published in "The Bookman" in January 1922:

"Those who have followed Donn Byrne know that he is a romanticist rather than a realist. When he came over here from Ireland in 1912, the first things he sold to American magazines were stories and poems of a romantic character. His 'Fountain of Youth,' the story of Ponce de Leon, came out in 1916: 'The Ballade of Old Time Captains' appeared about the same time. Then Mr. Byrne turned quite sincerely to the American type of story—the realistic and rather long short story. He was so successful at this that when he wanted to do the romantic type of thing the editors all refused to give him a hearing. In August of 1919, Mr. Byrne proposed to his then publishers the story of Marco Polo as a magazine serial and a book. His novel 'The Foolish Matrons' had just been accepted and was to be published in the fall. His publishers wanted something like it and would not hear of a romantic story. He made the same proposal to the magazine

which had him under exclusive contract, and they also refused to consider it. I can vouch for all of this, having talked with Mr. Byrne about the matter at the time.

"In March of 1921, when I came to the 'Century' magazine, I saw the chance at last for 'Messer Marco Polo' to appear. Mr. Frank and myself believed so implicitly in Mr. Byrne that we took the story sight unseen—and before it had been put on paper.

"Now to go back still further: when I first talked with Mr. Byrne about 'Marco Polo,' he told me how the idea had come to him and the changes through which it had then gone. When he was working for his degree in Romance languages and literature at the University of Dublin, twelve years ago, he came across a manuscript copy of the story of Marco Polo set down by a Genoese friar. The story made a strong appeal to him and he wanted then to put it into a narrative poem. Later he came across an Irish manu-

script of the same chronicle in the 'Book of Fermoy,' which is now in possession of the Duke of Leinster. The third source was an Irish folk tale which he heard from North of Ireland peasants, a tale called 'Turus Marc O'Polo.' In this Marco Polo is confounded with St. Brandon, and is made an Irishman. Finally, from Coleridge, came the idea of the great Khan, and from other sources that of Golden Bells.

"His first plan was to make 'Messer Marco Polo' a poem, as I have said: but he became convinced that prose—not poetry—was a better medium of expression. Then he thought of it as a play, and talked the matter over at length with George Hazelton, author of 'The Yellow Jacket,' and with other friends. But he gave up the play as an unsatisfactory medium for his story and decided to write 'Marco Polo' as a narrative when he had completed his exclusive magazine contract.

"The rest I have told you, except one or

two interesting details. He wanted the poet Li Po as one of his characters; but Li Po, unfortunately, belonged to another dynasty. So he made 'Marco Polo' a folk tale (and Malachi of the Long Glen the teller) in order that what would otherwise be an anachronism might be possible because of the teller's romantic license."

"Messer Marco Polo" delighted Glenn Frank beyond words, far surpassing his most enthusiastic anticipations of what final result Donn Byrne would achieve, as is seen by his letter to this "new" writer after the manuscript had reached his desk:

"If 'Messer Marco Polo' isn't a quit claim deed to immortality, it's a man-sized application for it. Where did you get the wizardry! Every page of it breathes a creative imagination at work, with apparently effortless ease, on a difficult task of historical reconstruction. Not a line of it written in dialect yet such is the artistry of sentence

structure coupled with an almost chemical distillation of the spirit of Antrim that I can't read the thing aloud without attempting to ape the tongue of Malachi!

"I am very, very happy to be the editor of the magazine that prints this story, instinct as it is with charm, with virility, and with scholarship.

"I hope I can lure you from the Gods of Gold long enough to do it again."

Probably very few writers have received a finer tribute from an editor than this one. Unquestionably, I suppose, Donn Byrne's laurels, so far as the world is concerned, will rest on this little book, which is invariably linked with his name. Nevertheless my own favorite work of his will always be that which he wrote immediately thereafter, "The Wind Bloweth." It happened to be the first book of his I ever read and it is still the one, to my mind, which stands out

above all the rest for sheer brilliancy of writing and the epic quality of its theme. Like "Messer Marco Polo," it also was written in the Riverside house. The original manuscript bears the title "Fiddlers' Green," which is the mirage of Dancing Town seen from the mountain-top by wee Shane Campbell, high over the waters of Moyle:

" 'Aye, Fiddlers' Green! Where is it, and how do you get there? The sailormen would give all their years to know.'

" 'Why for do they call it Fiddlers' Green?'

" 'It's Fiddlers' Green, laddie, because it's the place you come to at the cool of the day, when the bats are out, and the cummers put by their spinning. And there's nou't there but sport and music. A lawn like a golf green, drink that is not ugly, women would wander with you on to the heather when the moon's rising, and never a thought in their

mind of the money in your pocket, but their eyes melting at you, and they thinking you're the champion hero of the world. . . . And all the fiddlers fiddling the finest of dance music: hornpipes like "The Birds among the Trees" and "The Green Fields of America"; reels like "The Swallow-tail Coat" and "The Wind that Shakes the Barley"; slip-jigs would make a cripple agile as a hare. . . . And you go asleep with no mate to wake you in a blow, but the sound of an old piper crooning to you as a cummer croons. And the birds will wake you with their douce singing. . . . Aye, Fiddlers' Green . . .'

"And they were silent for a minute in the soft Ulster sunshine."

Here you feel the truth of what Donn Byrne wrote in "Messer Marco Polo": "Antrim will ever color my own writing. My Fifth Avenue will have something in it of the heather glen. My people will have

always a phrase, a thought, a flash of Scots-Irish mysticism . . ." "The Wind Bloweth" was likewise first published in "Century," beginning in April of 1922 and later that year in a volume superbly illustrated by the late George Bellows, an artist who was great enough to catch the imaginative sweep of the book's vibrant prose. There are passages herein that once read are never to be forgotten, such as that at the beginning, and repeated—effective as the climax of a great drama—at the end, of the episode called "The Wake at Ardee":

"The feeling that was uppermost in him as he sat outside the thatched cottage in the moonlight, while the wake was within, was not grief at his wife's death; not a shattered mind that his life, so carefully laid out not twelve months before, was disoriented; not any self-pity; not any grievance against God, such as little men might have: but a

strange dumb wonder. There she lay within, in her habit of a Dominican lay sister, her hands waxy, her face waxy, her eyelids closed. And six guttering candles were about her, and women droned their prayers with a droning as of bees. There she lay with her hands clasped on a wooden crucifix. And no more would the robins wake her, and they fussing in the great hawthorn-tree over the coming of dawn. No longer would she rake the ash from the peat and blow the red of it to a little blaze. No longer would she beat his dog out of the house with the handle of the broom. No longer would she foregather with the neighbors over a pot of tea for a pleasant vindictive chat. No longer would she look out to sea for him with her half-loving, half-inimical eyes. No longer in her sharpish voice would she recite her rosary and go to bed.

"And to-morrow they would bury her—there would be rain to-morrow: the wind

was sou'east—they would lower her, gently as though she were alive, into a rectangular slot in the ground, mutter alien prayers in an alien tongue with business of white magic, pat the mound over as a child pats his castle of sand on the sea-shore, and leave her there in the rain.

"A month from now they would say a mass for her, a year from now another, but to-morrow, to-day, yesterday even, she was finished with all of life: with the fussy, excited robins of dawn; with the old dog that wanted to drowse by the fire; with the young husband who was either too much or too little of a man for her; with the clicking beads she would tell in her sharpish voice; with each thing; with everything.

"And here was the wonder of it, the strange dumb wonder, that the snapping of her life meant less in reality to him than the snapping of a stay aboard ship. The day after to-morrow he would mount the deck of Patrick Russell's boat, and after a few crisp

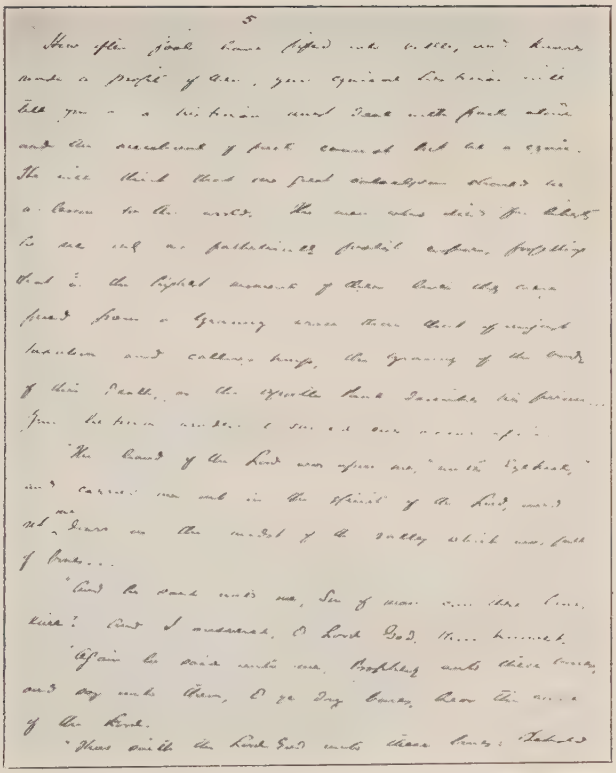
orders would set out on the eternal sea, as though she were still alive in her cottage, as though indeed she had never even lived, and northward he would go past the purple Mull of Cantyre; past the Clyde, where the Ayrshire sloops danced like bobbins on the water; past the isles, where overhead drove the wedges of the wild swans, trumpeting as on a battle-field; past the Hebrides, where strange arctic birds whined like hurt dogs; northward still to where the northern lights sprang like dancers in the black winter nights; eastward and southward to where the swell of the Dogger Bank rose, where the fish grazed like kine. Over the great sea he would go as though nothing had happened, not even the snapping of a stay—down to the sea, where the crisp winds of dawn were, and the playful, stupid, short-sighted porpoises; the teacherous sliding icebergs; and the gulls that cried with the sea's immense melancholy; and the great plum-colored whales . . ."

"The Wind Bloweth," as was fitting, was received with considerable praise, both critical and from the world at large. Stephen Vincent Benet, poet and novelist, reviewed the book in "The Literary Review," wherein he described it as "a tale as fine and keen and supple as Toledo steel, magnificently scabbarded in words that are Spanish leather and gems and gold thread. Any one who cares for the sea or beauty or adventure or the craft of words will read 'The Wind Bloweth' . . . it sticks out among the books since 'Messer Marco Polo,' like a bottle of good Anjou in the shine and sticky glitter of the syrups of a soda-water fountain." David McCord, in another review, wrote: "To Donn Byrne at his birth angels gave the power to paint with words as, probably, no contemporary writer is capable of painting and a lyrical quality of style comparable only to the dignified nostalgia,

the wild sweetness of Yeats. . . ." And Professor Richard Burton of Columbia University sent this to Donn Byrne's publishers:

"I regard it as a duty to send you a word of congratulation on Donn Byrne's 'The Wind Bloweth.' After reading that book and 'Messer Marco Polo' before it, I am confirmed in the opinion that this young writer is easily the most brilliant and promising romanticist in sight in this country today. His second book (if it *is* his second) is a magnificent piece of romantic writing. It's long since anything stirred me more. Expressionally, it's a wonder. And it is a deep, wise beautiful reading of Life, as well. I don't foam at the mouth, as a habit. But by the *Gods*, I'm going to tell my audiences everywhere not to overlook a truly creative artist!"

In spite of their successes, Brian and Dolly were then spending much more money than they had and their credit had gone 'way



PAGE OF MANUSCRIPT FROM "FIELD OF HONOR"

beyond its limit. They lived "like fighting cocks" (this description is Dolly's), their luxuries including even a house-boat in Miami. Then the bottom suddenly dropped out. Creditors who had been waiting in vain for payments long overdue all demanded immediate attention: the result was that Brian was hounded to death with no money in sight with which to placate them. So finding it utterly impossible to go ahead with his writing under these circumstances, he decided the best thing for them to do was to sell the house and clear out altogether. The house went for $20,000, every penny of which was turned over to the creditors.

Brian then decided to go to Arthur Vance, editor of "Pictorial Review," and ask for a sum in advance on stories which would enable him to take his family to Ireland. He was amazed at the readiness with which Mr. Vance signified his willingness to help.

"Sit down there a minute while I make out the check," he told Brian. Thus Brian received an advance of $2,000 on stories to be done for "Pictorial Review," a kindness which was never forgotten, either, for Brian always saw that Mr. Vance had the first choice of everything else he wrote.

There seems something ironical about this letter, which Mrs. Donn Byrne received not so long ago from the present occupant of their Riverside place:

"People seem to call it 'The Donn Byrne House' with great affection, and I can assure you since reading 'Destiny Bay,' we are eager to keep the memories of Mr. Donn Byrne alive."

## CHAPTER V

### RETURN OF THE NATIVE

It's a far cry from Riverside, Connecticut, to Hope Cove in Devonshire, reached after a heavenly drive from Plymouth, in two great cars, along narrow roads lined with trim green hedges. Lambs and sheep grazing in the meadows, sea-gulls wheeling overhead—and the primroses! Everything green, cool, and sweet.

The Donn-Byrnes' cottage, The Moorings, looks ideal (although they find it has its back to the morning sun) in a place all jumbled together between two great lines of cliffs; every house seems to group itself naturally with respect to all the others. There are thatched roofs, queer twists and turns, flowers everywhere, white-wash, and

a smell of tar and rope and fish as men drag in their nets before the very door of the cottage. In front of the public house, which is called "The Hope and Anchor," people are dancing while a band plays "Daisy, Daisy" and other tunes of the nineties. Mists shoot down from the upper world and sag and lie flat on the house, rain falls drenchingly, winds flurry and flirt and are utterly inconsistent, but once in a great while the sun shines. In the afternoon the sea comes tumbling toward you in floods of gold and silver. From out on the cliffs here you can see 'way past Plymouth to Cornwall. The golf links is a good two-mile walk over the cliffs toward Cornwall, a lovely walk, but as an appetizer for eighteen holes a bit too long.

Vegetation seems so delicate compared with America's coarse growth; over there spring comes with a great rush of violets and

then they're gone before you know it; a flare of apple blossoms and a flash of roses and then high summer is there, hot and dusty, smelling of gas. In England spring comes slowly and quietly and daintily, and lingers.

They have a *pro tem* cook who is a wonder: he wears riding-breeches, short socks, galluses, has a three days' growth of beard, and a Woodbine cigarette carefully tucked behind his ear. He answers to the name of Norman and cooks like a stoker. He tells Brian he was the champ boxer of his regiment and promises to give him a few pointers.

The second week a trip to London on business; nice town, nice people, good coffee. At a dinner with another Irishman, St. John Ervine. Also two delightful publishers, Fred Rymer and David Murray, both of Sampson Low, Marston & Company —they are to be Brian's English publishers.

In the Piccadilly Grill they meet Fannie Hurst looking forlorn but determined to drive through England in spite of the fearful weather. They meet Jack Dempsey while there, and Brian forms another close friendship. They meet Spike Hunt, most notable of Say-bo's.

A day to remember: May 26, 1922. "Messer Marco Polo" makes its début in England—his first book to appear there.

Blissfully unaware of the events that are about to happen there, Brian decides to leave for Ireland that June. The long journey to Fishguard, where they take the boat for Rosslare, is made on Whitmonday. En route they stop for an hour at Exeter to see the old cathedral; then on through Wales. The boat lands at Rosslare at the ungodly hour of five in the morning, but how good it is to be up and how fresh and sweet the landscape, how different from England!

Breakfast on the train to Waterford and a glimpse of Dolly's old home, New Rath Lodge, County Kilkenny, seen from the train, shining in the early morning sunlight. The hawthorne is a blaze of white and they pass green, shaggy meadows where horses stand to their middle in foggy dew.

Three lovely days in Dublin at the Hotel Shelbourne on St. Stephen's Green, meeting old friends again, including "Ginger" and the rest, and making new ones. A house is rented, Greythorn, near Kingstown, high up on Glenageary Hill, against a background of the Wicklow Mountains and overlooking a wide sweep of valley and the sea beyond. What a place to work in! The beautiful hills, blue and green, and the light and shade. The peaty smoke of the cottages whorling, and the clouds, their shapes constantly changing. In the garden, trim, measured, green, and blazing flower-beds;

the high gray wall a background for mysterious wealth of flowers and greenery: roses, shrewish pansies, big sheep-faced daisies, secretive glossy bushes, friendly flowers, well-nourished and well-bred. The moat around the square gray house; the formal stands before the steps with the formal daisies and the red border; the oaken door, the highly polished brasses; everything is old, assured, unapologetic, no attempt at display, just a carefully nurtured harmony. . . . When I went to see Greythorn a short while ago, after a long walk up Glenageary Hill, I found the house shut up, having been vacant more than a year and the new tenants who were to take it not yet in.

Following the success of "Messer Marco Polo" and "The Wind Bloweth," Donn Byrne's American publishers had, in the

meantime, decided to issue a volume of his short stories under the title "Changeling," the name of the first therein. This is a representative collection of his finest work of an earlier period done for the magazines which also brought forth high praise from all quarters. Again Professor Burton paid tribute to Donn Byrne in a letter to his publishers:

"It is a pleasure to say to you that a reading of Donn Byrne's 'Changeling' deepens my admiration for him as a writer, and confirms the conviction that he is the most significant romanticist in America to-day. When the volume was finished, I asked myself if a finer collection of short stories, so far as I was concerned, had appeared since, in the eighties, Kipling's 'Indian Tales' was given to the world; and, honestly, couldn't name it! 'The Keeper of the Bridge' is a superb example of Byrne at his best; in it, I think, he does the most difficult

thing that can be done in fiction: so creates atmosphere, and mood in the reader, as to produce sympathy and acceptance of those supernatural elements, as an appeal to human psychology, in which the souls of men have rootage; and at the same time, the noblest in human nature is evoked. There are other extremely brilliant tales, which I can't take time to particularize.

It may interest you to know that in the Columbia course indicated by the enclosed announcement, I shall discuss next Monday morning, Nov. 5, the fiction of Byrne. . . . My treatment will be based on the thought that here is a first-class man, not being yelled about, yet head and shoulders above those who *are*."

Most of the stories are dedicated to Brian's friends:

"So you are going to bring out a book of your stories, said the Old Poet.

"I think I am, sir, said I.

"I'm sorry for it, said the Old Poet, for it won't have a friend in the world.

"When it comes to the publishing of books, people are always pessimistic, and, in my case, always right. Success, I am sufficient of a heretic to believe, matters little, but friendship a great deal. And I could as little think of sending a story friendless into the world as I would of sending a child, a horse, or dog. . . ."

Thus "Changeling" he "put under the friendly hand of the Right Honorable the Lord Justice O'Connor, who will find law treated in it in a *dégagé* manner that will surprise even him." Allowances may well be made, however, if the courtroom in "Changeling" is a little more—or less—of your courtroom in real life and if the magistrate proves more human than most magistrates sitting in criminal courts; the fact remains that Donn Byrne perfectly recreates

the scene of a murder trial, as effective and convincing as in O. Henry's tales of the Four Million. It is a splendid story, one which assuredly places its author in the very front rank of short-story writers. It is told, simply and movingly, by the hard-boiled Irish detective who is sent, because he's a "square cop," to Tahiti to "get" the Broadway chorus girl, the cast-off mistress of the rake she killed. "Changeling" was written before that other short-story classic, *Miss Thompson* (from which the play "Rain" was adapted), and that part of the action which takes place on an uninhabited island in the South Seas, on which the two, the detective and woman being brought home to justice, are cast up when their ship is wrecked, is certainly equal to the best of Somerset Maugham's writings of like nature. But to write about it further would be spoiling it for those who are yet to read it. It

might be added, however, that it was twice made into a motion-picture, first silent and later a sound film. Only four of the stories in this volume are pure Irish narratives, the best of which is *Reynardine*, dedicated to the pair who collaborated on that fine book, "Some Experiences of an Irish R.N.," Somerville and Ross—"their pens were one of the lost Irish glories." It has to do with the legend of the Fitzpauls, an Irish family whose crest is a fox courant, with whom, according to tradition, the animal is linked by some mysterious friendship. In *The Barnacle Goose* there is something of the author's own life, being about an Irishman who returns to his native land after many years in America. *In Praise of Lady Margery Kyteler* foreshadows the romantic Irish mood to be developed in later work; it is dedicated to Arthur Somers Roche, "in memory of a chivalrous kindness." Donn

Byrne's interest in Biblical narrative is seen in two stories, *Delilah, Now It Was Dusk* and *Wisdom Buildeth Her House,* the former dedicated to Bulmer and Clare Hobson, and the latter to Brinsley MacNamara, "that splendid Irish novelist." There is even a prize-fighting yarn, *Irish,* "for Jeffrey Farnol—none more than he loves and understands the Ring." And the dedication is concluded with this one regret: "I am sorry there is not a story of war and its intricacies in the collection to dedicate to my friend Lieutenant-General J. J. O'Connell." Perhaps the author considered "The Keeper of the Bridge" good enough to go out "friendless," for there is no name linked with this. Professor Burton's estimate can stand, heartily seconded by me. Indeed, the story is *all* mood, sweeping the reader along like the torrent pouring under the bridge:

"Out of dumb rock and lifeless iron the bridge arose. First these were only amorphous objects, and then through the fire of genius was evoked an entity. The bridge had a personality strong as a man's, as houses have personalities, and some trees. It rose there strong and slim and beautiful and of use to men, but terrible as an army with banners. And though Simon Lovat and his wife Cecily said nothing to each other about it, yet there arose in both their minds that the bridge demanded and needed something. And ancient lore of bridges came to them in lightning flashes of memory —old stories of terror that told of human sacrifice before a bridge would stand. What ancient mysticism made the priests of Pons Sublicius of olden Rome throw dummies of human beings into the Tiber on festal days? What horror of old made British Virtigern build his castle over the dead body of a murdered boy? Even in China of to-day, a pig was thrown into the river in times of flood,

that the bridge should hold. And gnarled old masons told tales. . . ."

Lovat's bridge holds through a mighty flood, but costs the sacrifice of his young wife's life.

Another, and better known, writer wrote a letter in appreciation of these stories:

I've read it with immense interest and unceasing admiration. I don't know when I have come across such fine short stories. This man has genius or something very like it. The sheer writing is a joy.

MAY SINCLAIR

Even in November things are fresh and lovely still at Greythorn. The trees and flowers and bare branches of the fruit trees rustle very softly in their sleep; they never die here as they do in Connecticut—they sleep lightly. . . . Brian is writing his lovely story of the blind poet, Raftery, and

his Spanish wife, Hilaria, and their wanderings through Connaught, the most romantically beautiful part of Ireland:

"And they would go then, Hilaria and he, on the long road that rambled southward to the seaport of Cork, over the heather-covered braes. The sun would rise on their left hand, and the warmth of it would come on them, soft as honey. Great drowsy Shannon would go with them part of their way, and listening one could hear the leap of the trout and the plunge of the otter, and the soft crooning of the river as its edge touched some little beach of rounded stones. And the mountains of Connemara on the right-hand side, one could feel their great golden entities. And all the scents of the flowers would come to him; the honeyed heather; the honest perfume of the humble flowers of the field, crimson-edged daisy and varnished buttercup; the modest violet with its fragrance like a soft note of the harp; and the high fine scent of the bog-flower. And

on nights the moon would be up and they would ride on, the river singing beside them and the wind stirring the grasses, until one felt that accompanying them on the march were a host of the little people of the hills, the minute Irish fairies and the shy, light-footed leprechawns, called up by the soft magic of the moon."

"Blind Raftery," which is about the length as "Messer Marco Polo," appears in full in one issue of "Pictorial Review," that of August 1924, and soon thereafter between covers. "You seem to me to have done something quite apart and exquisite," May Sinclair writes Brian. "I read it with immense interest and admiration."

After the New Year, Brian leaves Greythorn for Montrose, an unusually beautiful place surrounded by high walls, with a wide expanse of green fields and spacious gardens. You enter through a big gate on the Stillorgan Road and follow a winding drive-

way up to the house which is set well-back. Past Montrose, and on the opposite side of the road, is a convent—beyond a doubt the source of inspiration for the next book, a poignant tragedy of a man who unwittingly marries a nun. Another short novel, it is published as "An Untitled Story" in several issues of "Century," beginning in December 1924, though called "O'Malley of Shanganagh," when later brought out in book form. Here is Donn Byrne in a different, more bitter, mood.

Montrose itself is the setting of this story, Montrose and the surrounding country, to the south of Dublin, which "is loveliest Ireland, Rathfarnham, Milltown, and the singing Dodder, the blue peaks of the Sugar Loaves, Two-Rock and Three-Rock Mountains, and there are little lakes in the hills. . . ."

And Montrose, or Shanganagh, as it is here depicted:

"It was so many years since he had been home now that O'Malley had all but forgotten how sweet the old place was. The low ivy-covered building with the tall trees about it, the green lawns, the French windows which his Father had had let into dining- and drawing-rooms, turning the old Irish house into some esthete's dream of delight. . . . The eaves with the swallows' nests, whence they would dart at eventide. And here all around the lawn were small modest flowers, an herbaceous border, as the gardeners called it. Down back of the house were orchards, with beehives all about them, beehives of yellow straw, with the brown population humming in and out, on their way to the heather of the Scalp, or to the corn-fields where this summer the poppies were a nuisance to the farmer people, but a godsend to the brown humming bees. All, all were there, the flowers in the garden, the stately trees, the sleek dappled cows in the byres, the matched horses. . . ."

## CHAPTER VI

### IRELAND FOR IRISHMEN

"THE proper subject of conversation for an Irishman, you may have noticed, is Ireland," he writes in "A Foreword to Foreigners," the preface to "Hangman's House," described as "a book of Ireland for Irishmen." An Irish novelist—

"must not forget that his first duty is homeward. . . . If you want to parade before foreigners, you can have the foreigner's praise, and no more. You will never know that love that Thomas Moore knew, or Charles Lever, or Miss Edith Somerville and 'Martin Ross.' The poet William Yeats might not be forgiven for introducing the nine bean-rows of English suburbanity (as of Kingston-on-Thames or Sunbury, God

knoweth!) into the eagle-haunted heather of Innisfree had he not written that 'Ballad of Father Gilligan' that is like a violin bow across our heart-strings. And that Mister Synge, who gained so many plaudits abroad some years past, had never a 'God bless the work!' from home because he would not, or could not, write an Irish play for Irish men."

He continues:

"I am certain that no race has for its home the intense love we Irish have for Ireland. It is more than love. It is a passion. We make no secret of it, and people gibe at us, saying, with a sneer that does not speak well of their manners, 'Why don't you go back to Ireland?' Which is not merited, for every one must know the intricate prison this life is, and how this friendship, that grave, and even the unutterable vulgarity of money matters tie us to an alien land. So that to many a million of us, and a million's

sons and daughters, Ireland must be a land of dreams. . . .

"It happened that I returned to Ireland after the German War, in a period very unsettling for all countries and for ours particularly so. Many native precious things were gone. A new era has always a new civilization, perhaps better, perhaps not. Whatever remains, the old fashion of Irish novels is dead as Pharaoh. And to myself, the last traditional Irish novelist (the last, living masters, because the youngest: I have only begun my six and thirtieth year), the work of writing the last traditional Irish novel has fallen. We shall always—please God!—have Irish writers, but their models will be Scandinavian or American. Our young men have seen terrible realities, and in the Ireland of the future you must be efficient in order to live. And so the school of Goldsmith and Sterne will pass, and the author will appeal to the brain instead of the heart, which is perhaps as it should be—

and perhaps not. But coming home to Ireland at that time, it seemed to me that I was like some young poet of Carthage who was returning to find great Dido in her tomb, and whose work it was to set down, for men and men's sons to remember, the shining beauty of her face."

"I don't suppose that down in their heart of hearts anybody cares a tinker's curse about politics, barring politicians"—this also from "Hangman's House." "Give us good racing, cheaper cigarettes, and civil policemen, and your Lordships may sleep better of nights. . . ."

While he is at work on "Hangman's House" Dublin is in a state of turmoil. The Four Courts building is the center of the struggle between the Free State forces and the Republicans, and the explosion of a land mine, fired by the Republicans as they leave the building, is heard plainly out at Mont-

rose. Dublin is an inferno of flames and Mars is rioting in O'Connell Street, with all the city turned out to see the fray. Brian, however, has taken no sides in the "disturbance": like every one else, he regrets what has happened and hopes things will come out right. He is working particularly hard at this time, having for a while two books in progress simultaneously. Apart from his books he is playing golf and going to the race meetings at Leopardstown or the Curragh whenever he can. In the evenings there are friends in for dinner and bridge or perhaps he and Dolly go out themselves.

"He lived the life of Ireland then in a natural way—at a period when such was not easy ['Ginger' O'Connell aptly puts it]. Conversationally he was exactly the same as ever. I remember the Siki-McTigue fight on Patrick's Night 1923 when we disagreed with the verdict. Brian turned to me—in a

period of prolonged and passive defence by McTigue: 'Is our last illusion—that the Irish are a fighting race—about to be dispelled?' "

It is, perhaps, only natural that Brian should bring the Irish movement, even if but as a faint undercurrent, into "Hangman's House," considering the things that are happening about him. The rebel Hogan, however, is but an incidental figure in the narrative—Glenmalure, the house of the grim Lord Justice, "Jimmy the Hangman," which is finally destroyed by fire, being the real protagonist herein. " 'Peter the Packer' had to live and die before the epic of 'Jimmy the Hangman' could be written," Shane Leslie has said of "Hangman's House," "the only great modern Irish novel." To my way of thinking, "Hangman's House," undeniably fine though it be in many ways, may scarcely be mentioned in the same

breath with "The Wind Bloweth" or "Messer Marco Polo."

"There is nothing the Irish are more proud of than their tradition of great rebels [this probably written to the accompaniment of machine-guns]. By some unknown law of periodicity a magic is flung on the country and the sanest men go rebellious. The young men see visions and the old men dream dreams. The ghostly tramp of the Boys of Wexford is heard in historic streets, and on the hills the Jackets Green of Sarsfield's troopers are sensed under the west wind. And a madness comes on the people, and once more there are green jackets and green banners and the moonlight glinting on pikes. . . ."

"Hangman's House" contains, moreover, as superb and thrilling descriptions of a fox hunt and a great horse-race as are to be found anywhere in modern fiction. The

Tara Hunt: "Here were hounds with pedigrees longer than the horses, longer even than the majority of riders to hounds"; the wizened earth-stopper bragging that he'd corked the hunting country "as tight as a bottle o' whisky in the parlors o' heaven"; the ceremonial killing of the fox, "gone now, Reynard, the sly one, to the dim occult paradise of beasts, where dwells the lumbering uncouth *pooka,* and where the seals go, who have brown eyes like women's . . ." And the steeplechase at Hannastown on St. Stephen's Day, won by Dermot, gentleman rider, on a horse which Brian has affectionately named Bard of Armagh, a race in which two jockeys are killed. Every real sportsman will bear me out when I say that here the hunt and race are done by a master hand; the genuineness of his writing is sufficiently attested to by the fact that nearly all lovers of hunting and racing prefer "Hang-

man's House" to any of the other books by Donn Byrne.

It appears as a serial in "Pictorial Review," starting in November 1925, and in book form a few months later. An inadequate and unsuccessful dramatization is seen in New York shortly after, while a motion-picture version does not fare so badly, the story lending itself more suitably to the latter medium.

Some rather unkind things are being said about Donn Byrne at this time, i.e., that he is sacrificing his talents on the altar of commercialism. I repeat here what I have said elsewhere: I don't believe he ever intentionally "wrote down" for any especial audience; if certain of his later work might not quite come up to the exceptionally high standard he had set for himself in "Messer Marco Polo" and "The Wind Bloweth," it was probably due to pressure brought to

bear from all quarters by editors eager for his writings. I cannot help but think that most of those things were said by disgruntled "friends" of his struggling days, exhibiting bad cases of sour grapes over the five figures in Brian's steadily growing royalties. To one such attack Brian did reply, because he resented the implication of being classed as a "synthetic" Irishman. This is the letter he wrote, published in the columns of a New York newspaper:

"A New York critic and a correspondent of The Chicago Tribune have objected to 'Hangman's House' because they say I am a 'Brooklynite.' I can quite understand any one disliking my books—it's merely a matter of taste. Many excellent books by Englishmen and Frenchmen and Scotsmen bore me intensely. If these objecting critics do not like them they are quite right to say so. But I don't want the impression to spread that the public is being fooled.

"My father's stay in America was not over two years, and I was three months old when I left. Neither of my parents even considered remaining there. My family has been at the foot of Slievegullion Mountain for as far back as Irish records go. Indeed, much of the surrounding territory is still in the hands of uncles and cousins. So much for that.

"As to the novel's being an outmoded model, I know that. 'Hangman's House' is a sacrifice to my people. They are a simple people. They know what they want. In 'Hangman's House' I am their novelist, my next books are for the general public. 'Hangman's House' is for my own people.

"The lad who knows I wrote 'Hangman's House' in Brooklyn is, I must in verity if not in chivalry say, mistaken. It was written in Dublin, in the year of war against the Free State, 1922-1923, mainly at Montrose House on the Stillorgan Road. Much of it was written at night behind iron shut-

ters and many a sentence has been interrupted by the roar of land armies and the rattle of machine-guns. I wrote it in the middle of the flames that were burning the country I knew and loved.

"I trust you will see that this letter is published. You know how I dislike publicity, but I think that this personal explanation is called for. Though I was born in New York, and lived there in my twenties, yet Ireland is my home. I have and always will have, please God, a roof-tree there, and if I am not under it at this writing the cause is easily imagined.

"I have suffered a good deal in my career in an attempt to write what I thought was worth writing, and as to Ireland I, like every one else who comes here, suffered, but I think I might have been spared the indignity of having to write this letter of explanation."

There is much of Brian in his characters, his men nearly all of them being great

sportsmen, racing enthusiasts, and lovers of animals. Of Dermot McDermot in "Hangman's House":

"At school when other boys were being given medals for their knowledge of Cicero and Herodotus, all he knew was how to cast a dry fly in a stream, and that got you nowhere. At the university the only distinction he had achieved was of being sent down for riding in, and winning, a point-to-point race on a borrowed hunter, when he should have been mugging up in conic sections. What gifts he had were useless in a world of thought. The knowledge of boats, and the tricky winds of the Irish Sea—that might win a cup but never a seat in Parliament. He had a healing hand with dogs and cattle, and that might win a dog's heart but never fame."

True enough, Brian did even ride in and win a point-to-point race when at the university (although he passed it off lightly

with the remark that it "was just a matter of lightweight"), but it has already been pointed out that he shone equally as a student; yet in "Messer Marco Polo" Malachi says that "scholars are a queer and blind people." Dermot, too, roams about Dublin, as does Brian himself:

"He would go into Dublin, and wander around there, and, queer fancies taking him, he would go where he would not be bothered by friends, down at St. Patrick's Cathedral, where the great dean is buried, and Earl Strongbow lies with his sword by his side, or down the quays by gray Anna Liffey, where the book-stalls are as numerous as in Paris, and out of the windows of strange dingy shops flash jewels that once adorned Irish beauties of old Georgian days, and great pieces of silver with arms on them that had once been great and are now forgotten."

While at work on his novels Brian still finds time to write an occasional short story.

Toward the end of 1923 there is published in "Collier's" an excellent racing tale, *A Story Against Women.* "If you are a certain type of Irish . . . there is a deep bond between you and the horse"—this is true of the old sportsman in this story who gives up a bet on the winner of the Irish Derby for love of a woman, only to learn too late that she is already married. And *Hound of Ireland,* which tells of an old rebel bringing the last of a breed of celebrated Irish hounds over from America to his country, now free, also comes out in "Collier's" that year. Both these two fine stories have fortunately already found their way between covers in anthologies of dog and horse tales. *Hound of Ireland* is included in "Real Dogs" (Holt, 1926), which volume is dedicated by its editor, Charles Wright Gray, "For Donn Byrne on Behalf of Stubbs and Dirty Dick." *A Story Against Women* is

reprinted in "Houses" (Holt, 1927), also edited by Gray. Another fine story, done about this time, and also appearing in "Collier's," is *Pipes o' Glory*, of the legend of the Grant's Piper, the ghostly pipes heard wailing whenever a Grant dies an honorable death. Here real pipes are played, to spare a traitor's wife the truth of her husband's ignominious end. Of "this now sweet, now harsh, eternally moody country" is here written:

"There is wonder in loving Ireland. There is tragedy in being loved by it. The kiss of gods is always a mortal wound, and the lovers of Ireland die on the gallows, in the dungeon or of that ailing which we simply call wasting away. The gentle rain that gives so much color at sunset, the soft mists that endue with emerald beauty the wide Irish fields, have a subtle poison, and he or she who gets it in his system is marked for death."

## CHAPTER VII

### PILGRIMAGE

With Ireland, nevertheless, too hot at this time for writing and living in comfort, Brian takes his family back to England, going first to Walmer, just below Deal by the old Cinque Ports of Kent and Sussex. Dover is but a few miles along the coast, hence the Continent, by way of Calais, within easy reach; Brian and Dolly spend much of their winters, when the children are in school, somewhere along the Riviera, at Cannes or perhaps Hyères. From Cannes they go to Newquay, on the north Cornish coast, then they hear of a delightful place down in Surrey, just out of Guildford, in the heart of the English country-side and yet near enough London for any matters of business

that may arise. The place is called the Warren Farmhouse and a farmhouse it is indeed, old and rambling, nestling at the bottom of a little valley. Completely shut off and remote from the outer world, it gives just that sense of aloofness that is so precious when one is in the midst of writing. And an excellent golf course is little more than a stone's throw away for diversion and relaxation.

When they are established at Warren Farmhouse, Brian and Dolly go off on a "waygoose," as he calls it—an old Cornish word for jaunt or excursion—and they have a heavenly time in out-of-the-way places in Switzerland and Italy, also prowling a lot around Venice, which Brian especially adores, knowing and loving every stone of it as he does.

For going on three years now Brian has had in mind the idea of "Brother Saul," a

life of Saint Paul, although not, properly speaking, a life or biography, but rather a book that will be fiction in the same way that "Messer Marco Polo" is fiction. Certainly it will be the most ambitious undertaking Brian has yet tackled, and also marking a departure from his recent stories of Ireland. For, not counting "Messer Marco Polo" and the volume of assorted tales in "Changeling," his last books have been pure Irish narratives—"The Wind Bloweth," "Blind Raftery," "O'Malley of Shanganagh" and "Hangman's House."

After Christmas 1925 Brian sets out on his wanderings in the East—Palestine and Syria—and about three months later he returns to Warren Farmhouse with the whole book in his head, down to almost the very last word. He writes to his American agent, O. K. Liveright, and in April there

comes a cable saying that Arthur Vance will buy the serial rights for "Pictorial Review."

The day after the Derby, Brian and Dolly leave for New York, visiting at Port Chester for several weeks—this to be Brian's last sight of America. They drive out to Riverside along the old road for a glimpse of their former home and go for a sail on the glittering waters of the Sound. There's so much life here it's rather maddening: England being a country where one exists in a seemly fashion till death overtakes one. Many old friends welcome them: ten minutes after they arrive at their host's house Mr. Vance rings up Dolly: "Where is that son-of-a-gun Donn Byrne and why hasn't he gotten here to see me?" As a matter of fact he is then already on his way to the "Pictorial Review" office.

In June they are back in England again at the Farmhouse and Brian asks Dolly to

"scout around and find me a house by the sea where I can meditate on my belly and begin 'Saul.' " She does so and moves the family to Dartmouth, which is on the south Devon coast—not far from Hope Cove—to a lovely house, at the mouth of the harbor, which belongs to a grandnephew of the poet Wordsworth. "Brother Saul" is begun there in late August and finished on Good Friday 1926, Brian writing steadily every day and very happy while doing it. It took him years to get his own picture of the man Saul; after that the rest is easy enough, he having all the book in his head.

Thus Brian makes his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, nor is he the first Irishman to do so, many of them having been drawn there from early Christian days when monks made their pilgrimages; later came the Crusaders fighting for the Cross, and so on down to our time with George Moore. From out

this crucible Donn Byrne hammers his white heat of molten genius into purest metal: the result, "Brother Saul," is, I feel, one of the great books of this generation. " 'Brook Kerith' is the same yarn spun out finer," writes Shane Leslie, "but there's more color in Donn Byrne's 'Brother Saul.' George Moore's bloodless and insipid stuff twists cleverly round an absurd fantasy. Donn Byrne converts the reader to Saint Paul but George Moore couldn't convert Saint Paul to Christianity itself! In any case the Irish school have used up Paul for this generation."

"Brother Saul" appears serially in "Pictorial Review" at the end of 1926, and between covers early the year following. Cranstoun Metcalfe sings a pæan of praise in the English "Bookman": "Romance is East, biography West, and rarely the two can blend. In 'Brother Saul' they do blend

perfectly; and the book is as good a biography as Dean Farrar's 'Life of Saint Paul' and as good a novel as 'Jew Süss'; viewed from the purely literary aspect it is better than either."

Donn Byrne writes of Saul's native city, Tarsus, in fair Cilicia, in singing prose, as enchantingly as ever he does of Ireland:

"The city was always a wonder to him. The Jews and Arabs laughed at it, holding Jerusalem and Damascus to be surpassing cities; but the red plain of Tarsus, red earth and red poppies, and the silver sea before it, and back of it the mountains of Tarsus, dour, threatening as an army of horsemen, held, would always hold, his loyalty. Flat-roofed houses, red flowers and green trailing vines, and Cydnus, the river that in spring was turbulent as Gaulish legionaries, in summer gentle as woman, surely Albana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, were not the equal of it. No, nor Jordan, flowing

sluggishly, muddily to the Bitter Sea. Out of the dark mountains it rushed, through the belt of pine and oak and walnut, and came down past wheat-field and corn-field and orchard. The tall cypress and the poplar and the silver olive-tree lined its banks, and the clematis and honeysuckle clustered near it. Always were there birds near it, throaty nightingales in the summer-time, and patient, crimson-backed pelicans. From the mountains it came, fearsome as men with daggers, but it moved through Tarsus with the shy, proud joy of brides."

In the young Saul there is something of wee Shane Campbell, something even of Brian himself, in his early love for the sea:

"All that was of the sea was kin to Saul. . . . All that had to do with a ship was kin to him from bow to counter. . . . All the men of the sea were kin to him. . . . Some wild masculine strain out of a thousand years back made him dissatisfied with the

security of cities. Old fathers who had followed Abraham, the friend of God, through the sand and snow of the Lebanon, fearless men who had crossed the burning desert after Joseph into Egypt, more fearless men who had fled to Egypt. . . . All their blood in Saul revolted against crowded narrow streets: and their God was a God of desert and mountain, not of narrow crooked streets. It was the narrow, crooked streets, thought Saul, that put a haze of grime between the eyes of men and the majesty that had thundered on Sinai. And Saul said to himself: 'I will have nothing to do with narrow, crooked streets, neither to barter nor to study in them. I will take the sea as my workshop and my dwelling-place.' "

So it is with a feeling of everything going out of him that he learns the navy examiners' verdict: " 'If he had the health like he has the head, he would be the greatest geographer in the world.' . . . 'God of

Israel! You look as if you were going into prison for life!' 'Well, amn't I?' said Saul."

As poignant and tender as the love of Golden Bells for Marco Polo is the tragic episode of little Nossis who pines away for the love her husband, Saul, denies her, her to whom love was as "a little tempest, the flash of white lightning, and after it a gracious coolness, as of the little rain the narcissus loves." It later seems to him, looking back, "as if I had been traveling through a country whose fairness I hadn't noticed, and now it comes back to me, trees, gardens, gentle rivers."

We see Saul as the Wolf of the Sanhedrim, the persecutor of Christians under Caiaphas, whom Shane Leslie asserts is accurately drawn from a contemporary Irish archbishop: "A lean, silent, powerful man, with his passions curbed like the mouth of

a horse. Bitter and hawk-faced, the other priests seemed afraid of him." Then the blinding vision seen amid the desert storm on the way to Damascus, and his subsequent preaching the Nazarene far and wide. Saul the man, Saul the Apostle, is more alive than he is in the pages of the New Testament, as real, as living, as any one among us to-day. And therein lies Donn Byrne's real genius.

There are scenes in "Brother Saul" that long remain etched in one's memory, such as Saul's encounter with the magician on the pagan isle of Cyprus, triumphing over the powers of darkness; Thekla's leap, naked save for her maiden's girdle, into the arena with the lions to prove to Alexander of Antioch the truth of what Saul, whom she followed, preached; that terrible voyage with Saul, a prisoner, being taken to Rome. That last, a passage of but several pages,

is one of the finest pieces of writing Donn Byrne has ever done:

"They did not know whether any longer the world existed, land, gardens, secure towns. For days, for how many days they did not know, all about them had been the roaring waters. The waves were bearded and yellow. The sky was bearded and yellow. Out of some terrible cold place between the stars the wind blew, savage with whipping rain, if stars there remained any, for none were seen. A sun there must have been, for a murky yellow, a dreadful sickly yellow came at some hours, only to show them the hopeless, barbarous sea. Of the great mast, that seemed high as Babel, only a stump as of a small riven tree remained. That the *artemo*, the little storm-sail, should remain, was a curious wonder, like a cat sunning itself on a dead, earthquaken city. Of the sea as they knew it; of the sea, harsh, black as iron; of the blue sea, blue as the flower of the flax; of the

gentle singing sea—those might have been only stories they had heard as children, when they were very, very young. About them was a thundering obscenity, as if the bowels of the unfathomable deep had been riven, trampled disgustingly, a horror too great for human minds to know. There were no gulls. There was nothing. There was worse than nothing. On the tenth day they saw a vast whale float, belly upward, in the distance, dead, futile as a mullet. Leviathan, who is so fierce that none dare stir him up, there he floated, dead, and no instrument of war had stricken him. They looked at one another in terror.

"Then they knew they were doomed.

"They had no fear any more. They had died so often in the last days, of each gust of wind: of the crashing mallet, of the furious insane hammering of the sea; of cold: of hunger: of drought—their lips were dry and cracked with salt, and only the driving rain moistened them torturingly. They

were all but naked, their garments stripped from them by the mad, indecent blast. Their arms were frozen to the elbows, their legs frozen to the knees. When they spoke, which was seldom, they croaked like frogs. Their eyes were dull, like the eyes of dead fish. . . ."

There are those who have raised their voices against Donn Byrne's treatment of Saul in this remarkable study; in most cases, however, I imagine such instances have been the result of certain prejudices, religious or otherwise. We are often so blinded by inherited or acquired prejudices that something of superb beauty may be lost to us for all time. . . . In a recent issue of "Catholic World" (published in New York), John J. Downey had a paper called "Some Objections to the Novels of Donn Byrne," wherein he quoted from the columns of "The Tablet," weekly

organ of the Catholic diocese of Brooklyn, thus:

"Donn, however, lost his faith somewhere. His life of Saint Paul, under another title, is decidedly rationalistic. He shows in this, and other writings, hardly a vestige of the Catholic faith that once was his."

"Brother Saul" is not the only book to grow out of Brian's pilgrimage to the Holy Land: even before it appears in print he is at work on another narrative in much the same setting—"Crusade." Although by no means as great a book as that immediately preceding, it is none the less a brilliant success. This especially apt observation from its review in "The Spectator" (London) is equally applicable to "Brother Saul": "Mr. Byrne does not write historical novels: by some occult conjuration he recalls the splendour of the past and proves it death-

less by living in it." The same is true of this comment, published in the newspaper from which Brian was fired for writing "bad English": "No modern writer has done more to put life into the dry bones of historical romance than Donn Byrne." "Crusade" is published first in "The Saturday Evening Post," beginning in September 1927, and in book form the next spring by Little, Brown.

Here the East and West do meet, a perfect blending of the Irish and the Arab in as fine and stirring a romance as could be wished for. This tale begins with Sir Miles O'Neill, Knight of the Cross, as prisoner of the Saracens and ends in his escape, with the Arab girl Kothra, from the pursuing Templars he had renounced. In cool, green Damascus Sheykh O'Neill hungers

"for the wail of the Irish pipe as the gallow glasses mourn for their distant land . . .

[and] though he had very solemnly cursed Ireland from the deck of the Flemish merchant's boat as Two-Rock and Three-Rock Mountains became small purple islands and then faint clouds in the west, yet in the three years he had been in the Holy Land, he felt his mind and heart going back there. . . ."

Half Irish, half Norman, O'Neill's thoughts go back not so much to Lucan, outside Dublin, where he was brought up by his cold Norman mother, but to his father's Ulster estate in Down, in that very part of Ulster, incidentally, where Brian spent his own youth. On leaving the East O'Neill is strongly aware of the kinship between Bedouin and Gael:

"Asia Minor had taken the place of Ireland in his heart, and now he was a second exile. The Arab story-tellers were like the Irish ones, the Arab dogs were like the coursing hounds of Ireland, and life, except for

the passionate gusts of religion and war, as in Ireland, flowed by softly and gently, as in Ireland too. Even the names of places had a significance like the Irish place names. Some of them the Tewksbury friar who was learned in Hebrew had translated for him, and they were each like little poems: Carmel, the Field of Fruit: Bethlehem, the House of Bread: Bethacherem and Bethphage, the House of Vineyards, and the House of Figs, and Beth-haggan, the House of Gardens; Engannim, the Garden of Springs; Nahal-eshcol, the Valley of Grapes. Since he had put Ireland away, Asia had flowered in his heart."

The brilliant conclusion of "Crusade," O'Neill's acceptance of Islam and his swimming out after Kothra toward the Arab boats, is, to me, an unforgettable picture:

"The riders suddenly came racing forward. Quietly and without haste he began taking off his physician's robes until he stood

naked and free under the golden Asian sun. He moved toward the water and stepped in. An hundred yards in front he could see the beloved head bobbing like a cork, see a white arm flick in and out of the water in a curiously childlike gesture. He took off in a long powerful drive. When he came up and shook his dripping head he heard the thunder of hoofs on the road, and an arrow plunked into the water beside him like a shallow stone flung from a sling. He dived, and swam under water until out of range, and came up laughing. Nearer came the fisher-boats, and turning over to look back he saw the chase checked by the water, and dogs standing and barking furiously, stupidly.

" 'Unto God be all Glory,' his heart sang. He turned and swam onward. 'Rabb el-'alamin, the Lord of all the worlds.' "

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WANDERING IRISHMAN

"I HAVE been the innocent bystander of the western world," Brian wrote, several months before his death, to his good friend and English publisher, David Murray, who had asked for a sketch of his life, "as you know yourself: as much at home playing baccarat at Cannes at the high tables as playing fan tan with Chinese laundrymen in a back street in Panama. The quiet bloke sitting in the Parthenon listening to the native guides filling the tourists with misinformation is me, the saturnine-looking individual talking to the Sheykh of El Azar is me. The very serious bloke trying to convert the French parish priest to the Holy Catholic

Church according to the reformed articles is me. The bloke cleaning up after the aeroplane race from the Copenhagen bookies is me, and the bloke cursing the mosquitos foraging around the Greek Temple is also me. I am the bloke waiting outside the cigarette factory at Seville to see if the machines have produced other Carmens and finally, my dear David, I appear to be the wandering Irishman always waiting in the most remote places to find my pal the Wandering Jew turn up and to ask him if he has got a cert for the 2:30."

One who was closely associated with Brian during his early days in New York, when he first began to write, has this to say of him:

"Ask me to describe Donn Byrne and I will tell you that he was a lovable but erratic genius, whose views of romance frequently justified him in casting truth by the board.

D.B. was to me the most plausible romanticist and picturesque prevaricator I ever met. He'd make impossible statements with the air of a Macaulay, so confident was he of his ability to sustain them. And, of course, that which happened to men of this type happened to him too—he overreached himself. When he described Captain Matthew Webb's swim of the Niagara rapids he drew on a perfervid imagination, for he was not born until six or seven years after it had taken place."

Another, who knew Brian intimately in later years, has been quoted thus:

"He hated democracy, prohibition, machine civilization. He was a typical romantic fighting North Irishman. He was frightfully extravagant. He was helpless in many ways to cope with the modern world. He made enemies galore, principally because he was misunderstood. He made it no

secret that he detested many American magazine editors. He called many of them merchants. If one of them accepted one of his stories and appreciated it for the wrong thing, he got angry and made another enemy."

It is easy to see why so many legends grew up around the name of Donn Byrne. No one, apart from his intimate friends, ever knew much about him. He was a very shy man and always rigged up a barrier when he saw some one coming with questions: he usually concocted some wild story, saying the first thing that came into his head to get rid of them. He talked oceans of nonsense, with thin grains of truth running through it—splendid bits of wisdom.

He was the kindliest man on earth toward any one who was down and out. There was one occasion during the actors' strike in New York when he took a short story from

some actor who was broke and sold it, almost at the point of a knife, to an editor with whom he had pull. The actor retaliated by handing Brian a whole batch of his stories, promising him ten percent if he could sell them for him. Of course all friendly relations ceased then and there. . . . The last act he did in England was to buy an overcoat for a golf caddie whose only garment had been stolen, the check for this being the last he ever made out. He was always thinking of poor people who lived nearby, and whether they had enough coal to last them through the winter.

As an offset to this kindliness, he had a habit of making enemies for the sheer love of doing so. He could with one sentence blast a man where he stood; he took the most violent dislikes—for no apparent reason—and then was sorry and didn't know what to do. He had a sort of antagonistic

manner and was courteous only to old people, those who were down and out or hurt in any way, or to children and animals: the others could look out for themselves. Fortunately, the people who loved him—and they were many—were always the sort who could see beyond mere externals, while those who couldn't bear the sight of him were often people who weren't sure of themselves.

He had a queer old-fashioned feeling for children and family. He loved his children, although he never seemed like the usual father: he treated them with a kind of respect and they treated him more as if they were his parents. He never bothered about their schooling, health, or any details as long as he thought they were getting a square deal. One morning at breakfast he heard sounds of a piano being murdered and he howled with rage. It was his eldest

daughter, then twelve. "Was that you making that noise?" and then, "Never as long as I live let me hear you put a finger on that instrument again!" And this at a time when he was paying hugely for her piano lessons.

He never had a penny to spare until about the last seven years of his life, but he did enjoy those last few years. He loved his golf and his fishing and he took such childish pleasure in having expensive things: the best fishing tackle that could be bought, the swaggerest riding boots, the shiniest car—he was like a child in these things, because he hadn't had things as a child.

He loathed the amateur in art, affectation of any sort; but he never failed to respect greatness or any little spark of genius when he met it and he never failed to help it—many friends in Ireland tell this of him.

His surroundings were not all important,

providing they were harmonious and didn't jar. When he went to a new place he made for the largest room in the house and looked for a good table to write on and a place for his books: the rest of the family could then sort themselves out. He was willing to pay anything to have peace and space, after which he hoped everybody else was happy.

He never rewrote a book or story and hardly altered a word—his manuscripts are cleanly written sheets with almost no changes or markings. And he never took advice from anybody. He always seemed to know things without the bleak discipline of learning them; strangely enough, he seemed to know nearly as much as a queer, gangly, poetical boy of eighteen as when he was a man of thirty-eight. He used his brain marvelously, never cluttering it up with useless information: he studied the things he

wanted, took what he needed of them, and completely rejected the rest.

His books are for the world to judge, and they stand on their own merits. There are millions who found unutterable beauty in them and there are others who could see nothing, although no one may deny his beautiful, careful writing, which possesses a lyric quality that is but rarely met with. Poetry he rejected early in life for the long road of prose that is itself poetry. And he hated narrow limits, preferring to make his own as needed.

It was often said of Brian that he was one of the youngest of men for his years, sometimes looking little more than a boy. Yet, again, he would come out of the room where he had been writing, his face gray and lined and tortured-looking. Then he would go out and play golf furiously and be at peace again.

He always had to have fresh flowers on his writing table: they were as essential to him as plenty of light and air. He never liked the obvious things in nature like roses or peonies or formal gardens; he liked queer illusive things like the faint "noise" of heather bells and the canavan or bog flower, and the shadows cast by the sun on the trees; the lonely evening star meant more to him than a whole blaze of moonshine and starlit sky. Adventure to him was in the hungry heart and the itching mind.

To him Ireland "always is the thatched cottage on the mountain side, the thunder of the hunt as it goes for Fairyhouse River, the grave, soft Irish voices. There is even a terrible black beauty about the mountainy men as, mad with solitude and drink, they crash through a fair fighting." Himself he referred to as a "mountainy" man.

"We are a poor country as to money, but we have purple heather and mountains golden with gorse, and rivers, great-bosomed and friendly, where men may dream. And the sea is kind to us. Our fields are green as the Prophet's banner.

"We do not, thank God, as a people, hesitate when the heart calls one way and the head another.

"A nation that is ever prosperous, always wise, seems to me a nation forsaken by its angels. One can see its inhabitants. They are tall and thin, with bodies cold as a fish's. They have long heads and foreheads like a woman's bare knee. They are dressed in black. Their eyes are not merry. Their dynasty of monarchs, for they will have sound, reasonable monarchs, are called Mareph the Wise, Riga the Opulent, Harno the Pious, Ning the Farsighted.

"They are the people who always do the right thing. They will go to power and

glory everlasting. Where, also, they can go, each stout man knoweth."

Nor did he look with admiration at the revolving wheels of progress in his Ireland:

"In the Province of Connaught there is the river Shannon, the broad-bosomed, majestic Shannon, which is being dammed and trained now by the Siemens-Schückert Company to provide electricity for all Ireland. What a peasant in his cottage wants electric power for, I cannot say, and indeed I have not heard any one ask for it. What industries it is going to serve are unknown. But engineers of the country that produced Einstein, and politicians so mentally able as to be in power,—their combined wisdom is of a profundity. . . .

"I suppose the explanation is that there is money in it. There is money, too, in harnessing a great steeplechaser to a garbage cart when his racing days are over. There would be money, too, for the Greeks if they

made their hallowed Parthenon into an open-air cinema. But in Athens I am assured I should be torn limb from limb were I to suggest it."

His letters reveal a remarkably keen sense of humor, such as this amusing, almost cruel, response to a questionnaire concerning the reading of newspapers and periodicals:

"It may interest you to know that I read no daily newspapers, either in the morning or in the evening, or occasionally or regularly; no Sunday newspapers either regularly or occasionally; no magazines or weeklies either illustrated or unillustrated, either regularly or occasionally.

"I find that information on world affairs conveyed by word of mouth is always more interesting and colorful than what I am told appears in the press. Also I have a slight prejudice in favor of amateur liars as against professionals.

"I am delighted to see that you are a Bachelor of Arts of Cambridge University. How very interesting."

How very interesting it would have been to see the expression on the face of this guileless seeker after statistics as he read the above!

Another letter, in reply to one from an American reader indignant over what he wrote about Daniel O'Connell in "Hangman's House," shows him in fine mettle:

"Because of the great sincerity of your letter and two or three very wise remarks, I am breaking a very rigid rule I have made of not writing to unknown correspondents.

"I am an Irishman myself and though from the North of Ireland have many links with your ancestors South. My favorite residence is my own Coolmain Castle in Cork.

"In 'Hangman's House,' the charge of cowardice against Daniel O'Connell is more

national than personal and I am sorry to reiterate that I must consider it well founded. O'Connell had the repeal of the infamous union of Castlereagh in his hands at Clontarf and that a few policemen should have turned him aside from it was not only ridiculous but a dastardly thing. Surely the blood that might have been shed on that occasion was much more worth while than the oceans we have shed since for a foreign power without thanks and for the merest pittance.

"This may come to you as a strange standpoint from a North of Ireland man and from what you would call a Protestant—though we consider ourselves belonging to the Catholic Church according to the reformed articles—but I will ask you to remember General Napper Tandy, the martyred Orr and Commander Henry Munro and understand that although we are mainly silent, we North of Ireland Protestants are, with the exception of the nailsellers and whiskey

merchants of Belfast, the most sterling patriots as any that South of Ireland or Roman Catholic communion can produce.

"As to the more human faults of Daniel O'Connell, no man of chivalry is going to mention them. I don't.

"It may interest you to know that a grandson of Daniel O'Connell's in direct and legal line is a very valued friend of mine. I refer to Colonel Donough MacCarthy Leary of the Inniskilling Fusiliers and two years ago I was sitting at tea with him and a grandson of Captain d'Esteere of the Royal Engineers and between all three of us there was perfect amity.

"If you do wish to quarrel with any one as to O'Connell, you might read the History of Ireland by the Right Honorable Sir James O'Connor, in which your forefather is handled in the most unfair style I could imagine. Sir James—formerly Lord Justice—O'Connor is a South of Ireland man and a Roman Catholic to boot, so if you

wish to fight anybody, I suggest picking on him.

"As to myself, if you ever get as far as fighting me—I say this because my people are so tough that I suspect many of being cannibals—the result will be only adding one more name to the martyrology of the O'Connell family."

For some time people in the British Isles were under the impression that Donn Byrne was an American writer, this, doubtless, because it was through the medium of American magazines that he first became known. And it is, in fact, only during the past few years that his books have come to be at all widely read on the eastern side of the Atlantic. One of his most consistently enthusiastic admirers in Britain is "Tay Pay" O'Connor, who has hailed in the columns of "T. P.'s and Cassell's Weekly," every Donn Byrne book as it appeared from

the English presses. He further wrote a foreword for the posthumously printed little volume, "Ireland: The Rock Whence I was Hewn," one of Donn Byrne's few pieces of non-fiction, first published in "The National Geographic Magazine." Therein "Tay Pay" has this to say of Brian:

"I am afraid I am a little too much of a realist and have seen too much in political controversy of the dark as well as the good side of Ireland, for Donn Byrne's pictures of that country to make the same appeal to me as those who know it less from the inside. The land bathed in poetry and universal good will was not quite the Ireland that was brought home to me—especially by the bitter controversy in its politics, in which unwillingly I had to take part—and I could not accept as a complete picture of Ireland this land of wandering and popular bards and romantic love. However, there it was, Mr. Donn Byrne had found his public.

"At last one day he came to see me. His personal appearance made as immediate an appeal to me as his books, for he was a singularly handsome specimen of a genuine Irishman. He was tall, he had a face of classic regularity of feature, he had a modest and winning manner, made perhaps the more so by the Irish accent which he maintained amid his many changes of fortune and residence; above all, he was utterly unpretentious. He brought along with him a delightful wife, as Irish as he, very handsome, very modest, very intelligent. I never saw a pair that seemed to me so instinctively and happily mated. I have not seen him since. He lived very little in London, but my recollections of him are pleasant in every way."

St. John Adcock included Donn Byrne in his "Gods of Modern Grub Street" (Stokes), published a few years ago, with this comment:

"I dare say Donn Byrne will laugh to discover that I have put him among the gods; he is that sort of man. But it is possible for others to know him better than he knows himself. Abou Ben Adhem was surprised, you recollect, when he noticed that Gabriel had recorded his name so high in the list of those that were worthy; and though I am no Gabriel I know a hawk from a handsaw when the wind is in the right quarter."

Together with Adcock's sketch is an unusual photograph by E. O. Hoppe which has completely caught Brian's shy and sensitive nature.

It was, however, for Shane Leslie, a fellow countryman, to arrive at this first adequate estimate of Donn Byrne yet written, in an article called "A Literary Beau Sabreur," published in the London "Outlook" several days after his death:

"The Irish literary movement began with a fitful playing at decadence in Paris a quarter of a century ago. It is going down under the fine flag of romance which Donn Byrne unfurled from a castle in Cork. Whatever Ireland has given to America, America has given in return Boss Croker and Donn Byrne, both more Irish than the Irish, for what Irishman with money or with talents would think of returning to live in Ireland? Another subtle difference between Donn Byrne and the Irish writers has been that he did not have to learn his Irish. The Gaelic bubbles through his work sometimes in the euphonious Erse or sometimes in direct translation. It lies under his saucy tongue like a drop of honey-dew. As a story teller he comes between James Stephens and the Silva Gaedlica. In America he is a best seller which should have damned him among the Bards. His first editions are not collected that I know and he did not broadcast his tales to incoming

liners from the Old Head of Kinsale. He was the last authentic story teller of the Gael. . . .

"In modern literature Donn Byrne stands as the beau sabreur who led the reaction to 'Main Street' and all the other mean and meaner streets in which Gissing and Zola and George Moore delved for their muddy material. The Irish literary movement began with the personal attack made by the author of 'Esther Waters' on the Dublin King of Anglophiles and Philomaths, the late Professor Mahaffy, nearly thirty years ago and it finds its requiem in Donn Byrne's far more generous 'Foreword to Foreigners' prefacing 'Hangman's House,' with its lovely evocation of a Dublin that is recently past: 'Where is Parnell's brother, who was daily a pillar to be seen? and that great Greek scholar, the friend of continental kings? and poor Endymion, with his umbrellas and his swords?'

". . . In a bitter and disappointed Ire-

land whence the Earls have made flight and the poets flown away even speedier than their poems, where only the savage realism of Patrick McGill or Brinsley MacNamara can flourish with their 'Dead Ends' and 'Squinting Shutters,' whence James Joyce poured forth the Liffey into the Cloaca Maxima of Letters, where Yeats is left deserted and alone with a Scandinavian torque of gold on his naked neck tying the Theosophic runes of Madame Blavatsky to the sacred rowan tree, Donn Byrne of Manhattan Island sang the shrill crusade of romance and the recovery of the holy sepulchre of story telling."

"Whilst doing this," he wrote in his preface to "The Wind Bloweth," "it seemed to me that I was capturing for an instant a beauty that was dying slowly, imperceptibly, but would soon be gone.

"Perhaps it was the lilt of a Gaelic song in these pages that brought a sorrow on me.

That very sweet language will be gone soon, if not gone already, and no book learning will revive the suppleness of idiom, that haunting misty loveliness. . . . It is a very pathetic thing to see a literature and a romance die. . . ."

Yet Ireland remains Ireland to him:

"We spend our lives seeking to form Ireland. Our poets come down from the mountain tops, crying: I have here a song that will make Ireland wake. Our young men gallop into the streets trying to found a commonwealth more noble than the dream of Plato. Our statesmen rise up with papers in their hands, saying: Here is the New Ireland we have wrought. Let it begin. The old men look at us strangely, with a curious lack of enthusiasm, but they say nothing to hinder us, for they, too, have known these dreams.

"Life goes on. New dogs go out to chal-

lenge for the Waterloo Cup, each, we hope, fleeter than the winner of last year. New horses go gallantly across the Aintree, seeking to win the Grand National. More eternal than the snow of the Alps is the heather and gorse of Three-Rock Mountain.

"The note of the cuckoo, the droning of the bee, and another foot to the height of great larches is our only measure of time. And suddenly we know that our heads are white as bog flowers. Light comes to us, and we see that we, who thought we were men making Ireland, are only children at her feet. We have been playing, with that play of childhood that is more serious than the enduring work of masons.

"Half an hundred moons, a few more harvests of the mountain ash, and our time is come to leave for *Tir nan Og*, to which our passport is that we loved our country. But the thrushes and the wrestling, the poems and greyhounds and chiming rivers of the

Assured Land can hardly tear us from her who has given us birth and vision. Herself has to draw us into her arms and put a quiet on us."

# CHAPTER IX

## COOLMAIN

After the summer at Walmer, Brian and Dolly, as I have already written, go to Cannes for the season. There is an orgy of gambling, they having just discovered "that delectable game 'chemmie' "—chemin de fer. At Newquay in Cornwall Brian writes *A Party of Baccarat* for "The Saturday Evening Post" to recoup the *coups manqués* on the Riviera. One has only to read this entertaining yarn of an American girl who nearly loses the family fortunes at baccarat to realize Brian's own love of gambling: the money lost or won at the gaming tables of Cannes or Monte Carlo is of little consequence to your inveterate gambler who plays for the sheer zest or intoxication—

call it what you will—that it has for him.

At Newquay, too, Brian writes the gentle tale of the sweet, blind Aunt Jenepher, in which appear also the great figure of Uncle Valentine, looking more like an ancient king with his fan-shaped red beard, James Carabine, half gipsy, half Irish, the last of the giants of the London prize ring, and the others of "Destiny Bay"—that Ulster cranny to which "it is good for body and soul to wander back to" after New York, London, or "that Monegasque gambling den, where sooner or later all good Irishmen are to be found." All those fine, rich characters are so beloved that it seems a pity to Brian not to carry them further after the first story, *County People*, so between "Brother Saul" and "Crusade" he writes the histories of each of them, which appear in "Pictorial Review" and "The Saturday

Evening Post" and eventually in book form as "Destiny Bay." He has great affection for this collection of tales which doubtless accounts for the book's dedication to his children thus:

" 'For Hedda, St. John, Jane Olive and Brian Oge

'Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. . . . For the Lord shall comfort Zion; he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. . . .' "

And there appears here also this prefatory note which excellently sums up the author's attitude towards politics:

"The Author of 'Destiny Bay' has requested his publishers to announce that in using the word 'Ulster' throughout the book, it is merely because his childhood was spent among the mountains and lakes of

Ulster and on the cliffs of Ulster. . . . If any phrases in this book of 'Destiny Bay' show a predilection towards one or the other way of politics, the Author prays that they may not be taken as serious. He has never yet seen a government that brought heavier apples to the trees or heavier salmon in the rivers or a more purple heather and for this reason politics mean nothing to him."

Of "Destiny Bay" he gives this picture:

"No place in Ireland is so beautiful, no place in Ireland so strange. Northward of us roars the Atlantic to the Pole, now gentle as a lake, as a blue lake at noon, as a violet lake when the evening star comes out, now ruthless and fierce as the Ancient of Days, grey and horrible as the Baphomet of Templar tradition, and as merciless. And south of us is the brown belt of bogland, white in summer with the lonely canavan, the white bogflowers, and the gentle sallytrees from

which harps are made: brown bog and black water. And here lie the last of the great Irish elk, and the Irish wolf, and the Irish bear, beneath the short stiff bog grass; the snipe, and the red-billed moor hen and the bittern of the ghostly call are now its denizens. About us are the mountains, gold and purple in summer with sun and heather, and in winter wearing caps of snow that are suitable to their ancientness. Here is our place, Destiny Bay, that low big granite house, whose foundations date back to when Irish history was but tradition and guesswork. . . ."

These six stories of "Destiny Bay" and its people are, to me, among the finest things ever done by Donn Byrne. In a letter to his publishers he writes: "I should say 'Destiny Bay' is of interest because it strikes me as the first time in literature that the countryside has been made the principal character and not a background. . . ." And of

all the stories I like best *In Praise of James Carabine:*

"So if you come to 'Destiny Bay' for the hunting or the fishing, and are taken in hand by the huge dignified butler, you will notice that his ways are strangely at variance with the customs of butlers you have known. You will note that during dinner, when he feels like it, he will mingle casually in the conversation, contradicting often in a gentle way my uncle Valentine, hovering solicitously around my aunt Jenepher, or passing a dry comment on a question of the day that is being discussed. When you return to London or Dublin or New York, I hope you will not boast that in Destiny Bay you were waited on at dinner by the last star of the old Prize Ring. We would much rather you said you made friends with our friend, James Carabine."

It would seem that this story is at least somewhat inspired by their own cook at

Hope Cove, who, it will be remembered, had once been champion of his regiment. . . . *Fair Girl of Wu* is another splendid story, showing the lengths to which a gypsy will go to repay some kindness, in this case journeying all the way to China, suffering the worst hardships, to render what he feels to be a signal service to the Irish gentleman who had saved his neck.

Brian and Dolly are again in the South of France for the winter, this time Hyères. While there they meet Dick Dawson, widely known trainer of horses for the Aga Khan and others—it was Dawson who trained Trigo to win the last Derby—who becomes one of Brian's closest friends. Brian often thereafter visits the Dawsons' place in Berkshire, near Newbury, where he is fascinated by the training stables and longs to own and breed horses himself. . . . At Hyères, as at all resorts, every one wants to know

everything about every one else, your complete personal and private history. Brian is an excessively retiring author, almost never discussing his books, except in the intimacy of his family or old friends. Certainly no one takes him for a writer. There is great curiosity over who he is and what he does. One lady, unable to remain in ignorance any longer, asks Dolly point-blank what her husband's profession is. "Why, he's a bookmaker," replies Dolly, with her customary ready wit, and so the legend grows up that the handsome Mr. Donn Byrne is spending his winters on the Riviera on his winnings at the racetracks. And Brian is so pleased by this that he never troubles to correct them.

It is about this time that they hear of an old Irish country estate that is for rent, Coolmain Castle, in County Cork, and it

sounds so attractive to them that they decide to take it for six months sight unseen.

The first glimpse of Coolmain confirms their judgment: a more heavenly place one cannot imagine. The ivy-covered walls; the fine Gothic arches, doors, and windows; the square towers and battlements; the terraces and gardens with mingled fragrance of many flowers; the softness of the palm trees in this gentle southern air; and, above all, its superb setting on a sloping hill overlooking the sparkling blue Courtmacsherry Bay and the broad, open Atlantic beyond. It is reached by a thirty-mile drive from Cork City, and the little old world village of Kilbrittain, a mile or two away, is the nearest link with the rest of the world. One of the loveliest things about Coolmain to me is the long avenue of stately yew trees with the high stone gateway, surmounted by an eagle, at the end, through which you can see

Coolmain Castle

the old castle walls. . . . I caught a first fleeting glimpse of the gray towers of Coolmain among the yew trees from the deck of the *Scythia* early in the morning just before that ship rounded the Old Head of Kinsale on her way up along the Irish coast to Queenstown.

Another winter is spent in Surrey, this time on a vast estate, Barwell Court, Chessington. Brian is put up for membership in the exclusive Sandown Racing Club, conveniently close at hand, by his friend, Mr. Dawson.

It has been said that much of Donn Byrne's success as a novelist is attributable to his early Irish studies, drawing as he does more largely than any other modern English writing author on Irish literature and folklore. At times he is bold enough to quote in the original numerous verses of the Irish poets, while the many rare idioms and

expressions to be found in his dialogue he had from the lips of the old women of Omeath; it is undoubtedly this unique freshness which accounts for much of Donn Byrne's popularity. And his love and appreciation for the historical is likewise an outgrowth of youthful predilection. The historical novel was the fiction of the people of South Armagh when young Brian was making something of a name for himself in his Irish studies. Mrs. Pender and James Murphy were the two best sellers and "The Forge of Clohoge," "The Irish Rapparees," and other titles since forgotten, were then to be found, it is said, as surely as a picture of Robert Emmet, in every home in South Armagh.

And so we have "Messer Marco Polo," "Brother Saul," and "Crusade." And "Field of Honor"—or "The Power of the

Dog" as the English edition is titled—which is Donn Byrne's last book.

"Field of Honor" is a development, begun in "Brother Saul," away from his Irish narratives towards a style stripped bare of the richness, the luxury, so characteristic of his writing and which comes so easy to him. His last book, for this reason, is the most difficult one of all for him, wherein he is obviously striving for a coolness of style in a historical novel for which he has done a tremendous amount of ground-work.

"If you want to describe it,"—this from a letter to his publishers about the book—"it is a naked conflict of skill and will between Castlereagh and Napoleon of which fleets and armies, even heroes like Nelson and Cambronne at Waterloo, were only mechanical projections of the men's selves."

This conflict Donn Byrne presents through the cool Ulster eyes of young Gar-

rett McCarthy Dillon of Derrymore, who leaves his wife, Jocelyn, a niece of the martyred rebel Henry Munro, to become King's Messenger and confidant of the hated bloody Castlereagh. It is a vast canvas, indeed, whereon Donn Byrne paints in gorgeous pageantry all the glowing figures of the Napoleonic era, a canvas as vast as the map of troubled Europe. It is a highly valuable document as a penetrating study of that "lonely maniac" Castlereagh, "obsessed with the greatness of the British Empire and the danger of Napoleon." We are told that "what Castlereagh really loved was Ireland, and now that his name was hated in Ireland, that men spat where he had walked, he could no longer be at peace there." And so to him who would go down to Downshire no more, "Garrett was the door through which he could escape from the mist of intrigue and the thunder of bat-

tle into a fairyland of Irish boyhood. . . ." There is this very real picture of Castlereagh:

"There was something unearthly and strange about him. He was like some spirit out of Mars, if there were sentient folk on the crimson planet, who had assumed an ill-fitting disguise of humanity, all will-power and brain. His very attempts to be human were pathetic. The beau of the drawing-room, the fop of Piccadilly, without any of their attributes of ease of manner. He spoke to every one with the vast courtesy of kings. All his life was a concealment."

Here, too, are Napoleon, "the little man who was part Cæsar, part *père de famille*"; Josephine, "about this marriage between the *sans-culottes* commander and herself, a worthless tart—she told herself—the destiny of Europe had revolved"; Lady Hamil-

ton, "the huge woman, nearing fifty, with the cold gambler's eyes, shocked the young Irishman. How could this old barmaid ever have captured great Nelson of the Nile?" And there are vivid glimpses of Nelson, the dying Pitt, Canning, Lady Hester Stanhope, and Wordsworth, Shelley, and Goethe. There is the death of Nelson on the *Victory* at Trafalgar, excellently conceived. Another fine bit is the episode of the sentry on lonely duty by Napoleon's grave at St. Helena and his gloomy musings.

The Irish is here less of a background; rather it is a thin mist of romance, tending to soften somewhat the political intrigues that fill the air and dim the blare of trumpets. And this is written of Fitzgerald and Emmet:

"And because of their deaths they were the lovers of young women's dreams, and the other men, who faced a white and weary

road of life instead of a leap into the cool waters of death, were only poor louts. It was so easy, too, for an Irishman to die, seeing that the next world was as close to him as the next turn in the lane, and so long as one did not go by one's own hand, death was never unwelcome."

And again:

"Death, she did not fear. Death had for her the quiet of an enchanted summer night, with the lake water glimmering under the moon, and the red deer coming down to drink at their pools. . . ."

Curious it is, indeed, to find him thinking thus on death during the writing of his last book: there seems something almost prophetic about it. He has always maintained, however, he would never live beyond his middle thirties and, strangely enough, during the last six months of his life he does

things he had never done previously, such as make a will and finish off all sorts of odds and ends. And he is kinder and gentler than ever before during this time, in spite of the fact that he is writing his last and hardest novel. When he finishes it, he insists upon going over it carefully and arranging it into perfect shape at once, and reading the final proofs of "Destiny Bay." "Field of Honor" leaves him utterly empty, tired, and worn out from the strain of long, hard concentration. Shelf after shelf in his study at Coolmain is filled with the books he had to pore over and assimilate for "Field of Honor," on Castlereagh, Napoleon, Wellington, Nelson and the rest: Joshua White's "Memoirs of Nelson," Excellmann's "Life of Bonaparte," Ludwig's "Napoleon," and many, many more. And he almost never took notes for his work; he had everything all in his head when he sat

down to begin writing, and the actual mechanics were only physical.

On April 30, 1928, he writes this letter to Mr. Liveright, his agent in New York.

"As I have cabled you, 'The Power of the Dog' is finished and I am sending the last pages of it herewith.

"I am too close to the novel as yet to know whether it has been a success or not. I feel that it has not quite come up to what I imagined it but they never do. Everybody who has read it is very thrilled by it.

"Will you please say something from me to Vance of thanks and best wishes. I would write him myself but where a book does not terrify me, a letter does. The older I grow, the less vocal I become.

"I have been thinking very much about the question of a new title to suit the 'Pictorial,' and while I think 'The Power of the Dog' still the best title and will use that both in America and England for book pub-

lication, I can think of nothing for the magazine except 'The Famous Victory' with possibly a few lines of Southey's poem put in as explanation; or 'Field of Honor.' These seem to me both to be very hackneyed. However, I feel that as far as the title for the serialization goes, Arthur Vance should have a definite say. If he or his associates have any suggestions to make, I should be most glad to hear them. . . .

"I am taking three months' rest which is very badly needed. Some time in August or September, I will do two short stories if I can find ideas that occur to me as being sufficiently important. Early in October, if all things are well, I shall be in New York and we will try to see if we can do something about the next novel. 'Destiny Bay' has been completed in proof and I go away with a very clear conscience. . . ."

Brian, in the meantime, has purchased Coolmain Castle for himself, so delighted

has he been with it after two happy summers there. One lucky night while playing baccarat at the "big table" at the Cannes Casino, "sitting in the midst of the Dolly sisters," Brian won more than £2,000—ten thousand dollars. Acting on impulse, he immediately puts his winnings into Coolmain. As Shane Leslie has remarked, many a castle in Ireland has been lost in a night's play, but Coolmain is the first to be thus won.

On one of his last letters to Mr. Liveright, wherein he tells that he is keeping "as fit as that other literary gent—Gene Tunney," he writes of two more books he hopes to do:

"The title of my next book is 'The Case is Altered,' from the name of a public house in Surrey. It has taken a great deal of form and vitality since we spoke of it. I have also in mind the novel after that, if I am spared to write it. . . . I told you I had

bought Coolmain Castle. I am putting in electric lights, a telephone and the largest white bathroom in Ireland."

He is inspired to write "The Case is Altered," a beer novel, as the result of a meeting in Dinard with the head of a brewery. The origin of the title is interesting. There is an inn by that name, built about 1805, on the road between Ipswich and Woolwich, to the demand of the thirsty "sons of Mars" then quartered in those towns. Then it was known as "The Duke of York," but at the end of the Napoleonic wars, when peace was declared and the barracks pulled down, the soldiers disbanded and the benches of the ale-house were empty. The old sign was then removed and in its place was put up the sad truth—"The Case is Altered."

He also has in mind doing a book on the horse, somewhat in the manner of his story, "The Parliament at Thebes" (in the

"Changeling" collection), a short book to be about the length of "Messer Marco Polo." And later, many years later, when there would be more time for thoughts and less need for action, a book of reminiscences, such as only he would write, of what he knew and had learned of life. But that probably not for another ten years or more.

From his last letters you see what plans he has made for future work. This, for instance, written to a publisher in New York:

"Thank you very much for your letter suggesting I do a biography for you. I am afraid that I find my plans are laid for work ahead for five years. I doubt anyway whether I would be able to do a biography of anyone as no matter how colored a biography, it would be no more than an elaborate criticism and criticism and creation to my mind are as antipathetical as fox and hound. However, I shall be across in New York in September or October and will be

glad to talk to you about anything from literature to life."

And this, written the same day, March 12, to a magazine editor:

"I am very flattered by your invitation to become a contributor to 'The Forum,' which happens to be one of the few periodicals I read and respect. I regret that as far ahead as I can see, in fact if I am spared for five years, all the time I can take off racing and sport and devote to writing is accounted for by a slave driver of a literary agent."

"Field of Honor" is finished at Barwell Court and Brian goes off for a three weeks' holiday in France with one of his best friends. He has been having trouble with his eyes, owing to such incessant concentration, and there is even danger of his losing his sight altogether.

On Friday, June 15, Brian arrives at

Coolmain from Barwell Court. It is the first time that he has come back there since buying the place. "I'm so glad to have a few feet of Irish earth to call my own," he tells Dolly.

On Sunday he wishes fervently that his children were all there with him, referring to the two eldest, still away at school in England.

Monday afternoon he dictates and signs this letter to his London agents, his last letter:

"Thank you for your letter. If you do not mind accepting the commission from me, I shall be glad to make the Cork 'Examiner' a present of that story as I have rather a warm feeling for their paper. Just tell them that with my compliments I shall be very pleased to have them print this particular story. Will you let me know if that will be all right?"

"I think I'll go for a drive before dinner," he says after tea. "Any one come along?"

Dolly is tired and asks Brian's secretary to go with him.

But Brian does not return. He loses his life when the car, the steering gear of which proved to have been defective, swerves off the road, unprotected by the sea-wall, into the waters of Courtmacsherry Bay at high tide.

Con O'Leary has written thus of the spot where Brian met his death:

"The wild west Cork coast used to be feared by every mariner, and many a sailing ship has been spitted on these treacherous rocks by the fierce Atlantic gales. The strip of curving road, whose sea-wall has been battered down in so many places by the ferocity of the winter breakers, runs by a silent, almost uninhabited countryside, bare

of tree as of man, a precarious ground where lobster and mackerel fishing ekes out the small sustenance of the shore, and the very cattle have to be hand-fed. Over a period of eighty years successive generations of its young men and young women have gone unceasingly to America, and those who remained behind have always been materially helped by the generosity of those who have gone. In time such a rot of depopulation has set in that some of the district railways, built with such hope, have been closed down and postal services reduced.

"When night comes down it is a desolate place indeed, with scarcely a good-sized village to throw out lights on that gloomy road, with its sudden twists and surprises, and the waters swirling in the caves beneath. I heard of a sad case of one of those Church of Ireland ministers who lead such lonely lives on this untutored coast—though some of them by sheer goodness of heart become enormous favorites with the Catholic Peas-

antry. When driving at night and in bad weather to a sick call he was thrown over the cliff on to the rocks, through his horse suddenly taking fright. When discovered by some fishermen, he pointed to his coat, indicating that he wished to take the communion wine which he was carrying. He died when being moved, for medical assistance is not always procurable in these places. In fact, it is a road memorable with tragedies of the land and of the sea. And if you keep on you will come to the old town of Skibbereen, which received a deadly blow in the famine of the 'forties of the last century and has two pits where the corpses were piled without coffins in that harrowing time. . . ."

A happier place, however, is the Rathclarin churchyard, not far away from Coolmain. There, on a hilltop overlooking the peaceful Irish country-side and Courtmacsherry Bay and, beyond, the open sea, is a Celtic cross marking the resting place of

Donn Byrne's Resting-place

Donn Byrne. It is of Newry granite, from the North of Ireland, and beneath it this inscription, in the Gaelic and in English:

I AM IN MY SLEEPING AND DON'T WAKEN ME

A rowan tree or mountain ash, planted by another North Irishman, is growing behind the cross and will one day cast its gentle shadows on this grave. When I went there I thought how much it was like that graveyard written of in "Destiny Bay":

"The brown bees droned, and the wild roses nodded, and everywhere was the rich blue of lupins, and fox-gloves tall and dainty, like ladies of the Stuart times. Near us chimed the sea, green and white, apple-green and silver-white, and around us was the glory of the mountains, the mountains purple with heather. Everywhere was peace, but nowhere more peace than in the graveyard of Saint Columbia's-in-Pagangry.

The parson might intone the words that argue townsfolk into the belief that being dead, we live. For us of the mountains and the sea there is no need of argument; we know. Around the little lichened church was a sense of welcome. The communion of saints, much as the parson feared, did not refuse hospitality to the alien sister. For the dead, with few exceptions, are a nice and kindly folk, else where is the profit in being dead?"

# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

Donn Byrne was thirty-eight when he was killed and I heartily agree with this opinion expressed in "The Outlook" (New York) shortly after his death: "One feels that he had his best work yet to do." Certainly this is borne out by a reading of "Field of Honor," whatever the reviewers may have to say of this, his last work. Had he lived on and continued to produce his books for, say, another ten years, they would very likely have shown, at the end of that time, as little resemblance to the books by which he is now chiefly known, as these, in turn, bear to his early "Smart Set" stories.

There are many who refuse to light three cigarettes with one match and there are as many more who will do anything to avoid

the number thirteen. Purely as a gesture of condescension toward these superstitious souls (and in order that they may not beat me to it) I shall here record that "Field of Honor" was Donn Byrne's thirteenth book. This count, however, does not include "Ireland: The Rock Whence I Was Hewn," for the simple reason that that little book was written as a magazine article, while all the rest of his published works, novels and story collections, were all regarded as complete volumes. And I am told by Mrs. Donn Byrne herself that a mirror on the wall at Coolmain fell, for no apparent reason, and smashed into bits only two days before her husband's fatal accident. Then, this was written by Shaw Desmond:

"Do you know that I always feared some such end for him? It is the only uncanny quality I have with any certainty—but I have never yet been wrong. He lived so

strongly and fiercely—and he died as he lived—and as I think perhaps he would have chosen. . . . And there was one thing of which I wished to speak to Brian. I have had a hellish struggle to get recognition for my real work as a novelist. It is coming—but slowly. . . . Thirteen books I have had published since the War, but always final success eluded me. It was one of the things of which I wished to speak to Brian. But that must wait, now, for another world.

"He was very fortunate in so soon getting recognition of such good work—but the gods, who, believe me, never give anything. They always hold something back. And so they waited their time. But neither they nor anything else could kill Donn Byrne. . . ."

In giving this book of mine its title, "Donn Byrne, Bard of Armagh," I should, perhaps, mention that "The Bard of Armagh," a few lines of which, from the ver-

sion in Richard Hayward's "Ulster Songs and Ballads," are quoted at the beginning, was one of Donn Byrne's greatest favorites of all the old Irish ballads. Then, too, it is to County Armagh that he owes his origin. It will further be recalled that the steeplechaser in "Hangman's House" is named after that lovely ballad. Mr. Hayward's collection, by the way, came into being largely through his friend, Donn Byrne. And the prefatory note by Mr. Hayward seems of interest here:

"The Ballad Singer is fast disappearing from our roads and market towns. At one time a familiar figure, with his handful of narrow, ill-printed ballad sheets, or his store of brightly colored song books, he is now only occasionally seen. The coming of the kinema to even the smallest of our Irish towns is completing his extermination, which was already begun with the advent of

national education and the cheap newspaper. Not so very long ago, every event of national or local importance was put into a ballad, and sung on the streets to a crowd eager alike for musical recreation and the latest titbit of news. Nowadays, the people go to the picture-house for their love story or tale of daring and adventure, and turn to the newspaper for information about murderers, and martyrs, and ladies and gentlemen whose domestic life is not what it should be. . . ."

Lieutenant - General O'Connell has praised Donn Byrne's rendering of "The Bard" and Mrs. Donn-Byrne adds that to see him and his great pal, Frazier Hunt, who is six feet six, "walking down Piccadilly singing 'My Old Man's a Fireman' at the top of their voices was some spectacle."

Many are the conflicting accounts that are told of Donn Byrne and for that reason I have been careful to see that what I have

written is fairly well substantiated. Thus, there are certain stories or legends about him that will not be found herein. What Thomas Beer wrote in his excellent book on Stephen Crane seems to apply equally to the author of "The Wind Bloweth": "Belonging to the vainest of professions, he took no trouble to annotate himself for history, and that carelessness remains a part of his charm for those who knew him." Donn Byrne's letter, which I have quoted at the beginning of chapter eight, starts thus: "I am at last getting down to doing this perfect nuisance of a job of helping you in your beastly tract. The more I think of it, the less I feel I can say about myself." And there was his reply to a letter from some one in a Tennessee school, asking about himself and for a recommended course of study in his writings: "I do not know what I can say about my life which is that of a very ordinary indi-

vidual who lives in the country and as to my works, well, the world has those and has to decide about them itself, so also has the Ninth Grade English Class and I am sure it is perfectly capable."

It will afford considerable satisfaction, I am sure, to the many to whom Donn Byrne's work has been a genuine delight, to know that an article on him is to be included in the fourth volume of "Dictionary of American Biography," now in the process of compilation. Both because of his being born in the United States and his justly won position in American letters is he deserving of this recognition. While working upon my own book on him I have been corresponding with Mr. Frank Monaghan, who is preparing the article for the Dictionary.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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